The FREE literary magazine of the North

Northwords Now

Issue 27, Summer 2014

IN COLOURS FIERCE AND JOYOUS

Aonghas MacNeacail remembers John Bellany

Poems, Stories, Articles and Reviews including John Glenday, Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul, and the Magic of Moniack Mhor

EDITORIAL

A RATHER INTRIGUING wee book recently arrived through the *Northwords Now* letterbox. *Dear Scotland: Notes to our nation* is a collection of monologues whereby modern Scottish writers address their fellow Scots by giving voice to men and women represented in the National Portrait Gallery. Sadly the book arrived too late for review but with the referendum fast approaching here are some of their thoughts on Scotland and Scots which may inform the debate:

I feel your futures stretching out like reckless sleepers Robert Louis Stevenson/AL Kennedy

Scotland, I have always found you a gloomy, backward, Presbyterian, unforgiving place James Boswell/Iain Finlay Macleod

Be the master of your soul Scotland Mary Queen of Scots/Louise Welsh

A wee country Scotland, you and me, welcomed the exile, the risk-taker, the refugee Jackie Kay

I am thrawn, romantic, disputatious and energetic Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham/James Robertson

Think thoroughly. Discuss the full dimensions of what you intend to effect. Then act without timidity or fear Muriel Spark/Janice Galloway

Issue 27 of this magazine marks a time of farewells. Firstly, all good wishes to Vicki Miller who, for the past twelve months has handled our advertising and accounts with the kind of care and precision that inspires much gratitude. She's also very friendly with it!

Angus Dunn is vacating his manager's role at *Northwords Now*. Angus' association with the magazine, as editor, writer and reviewer and all round loveable genius loci of literature in the north, reaches back to the last century when the old *Northwords* fell upon people's doormats with a welcome thud. With this in mind, I had thought of writing a valedictory notice that would make the average Oscar acceptance speech read like the small print on an insurance form. Then I realised what a good idea it would be to get Angus to write more for the magazine (see pages 12 and 13) so I've decided to remain in his favour and keep things simple. Much thanks my friend and in the words of Neil Gaiman, "Stories may well be lies, but they are good lies that say true things, and which can sometimes pay the rent." ■

– CHRIS POWICI
Editor

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New Address for Submissions
Northwords Now
6 Kippendavie Lane
Dunblane
Perthshire
FK15 OHL

Board members
Adrian Clark (Chair), Ann Yule, Valerie Beattie, Kristin Pedroja, Stewart Lackie

Editor
Chris Powici, editor@northwordsnow.co.uk

Gaelic Editor
Rody Gorman, editor@northwordsnow.co.uk

Advisory Group
Jon Miller, Peter Urpeth, Pam Beasant

Designer
Gustaf Eriksson
www.gustaferiksson.com

Technical Advisor
Tony Ross
webenquiries@rosssoftwaresolutions.com

Advertising
editor@northwordsnow.co.uk

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'Woman of the North Sea' by John Bellany.
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Submissions to the magazine are welcome. They can be in Gaelic, English, Scots and any local variants. They should be sent to the postal address. Unsolicited e-mail attachments will not be opened. The material should be typed on A4 paper. Contact details and SAE should be included. We cannot return work that has no SAE.
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Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

Poems by Aonghas MacNeacail

art, lived

i.m. john bellany

that he should go, with brush in hand,
engaged in dialogue with what had been
mute canvas, seems apropos, we might
have wished the breath had held its
measure
longer,
when a mind, still hungering to tell
another composition, still engaged in
shaping, shading, realising how the vital
shifting substance of an exact place
could be made new, again, again, again

a sailor of harbours who knew
all the stories of storms and
stupendous plimsoll-
drowning catches his own kin had told,
he believed in what he saw and drew it
out in colours fierce and joyous

he knew how to lay it on thick, to stipple,
stroke his pigment into lives and lived-in
patterns of tenement and trawler,
drank
deep from the well of changes, kept
his vision true, spoke to the world until
that final pause (his story cannot end

in portugal street

a woman giving birth in portugal street,
my grandmother delivering her last-born
who would not remember her, who would,
in her time, have scant memory of that
thoroughfare - she might have been a
city girl, but aunt, who'd take a mother's
place, could only be at ease with grass
beneath her feet - so grandfather was
persuaded to remove, lock, stock and
infant (with her sibs) to where his sister
could provide the necessary harbouring
and sustenance that would environ them
in what she knew of speech and spade
and feeding shores -
a father's death left
child, aunt, sister, brothers in absence of
that feeding shadow, she the warrior aunt
then wrapped around herself, becoming
mother, father, farmer, fisher, seamstress,
nurse - and then,
a war, called great, took
husbands, fathers, brothers, sons (to be
sent home as telegrams), from croft and
croft and croft - it left so many vacancies,
in beds, at tables, out among the growing
crops, where women learned to be the all
a family required, and children grew into
tall saplings forced to turn load-bearing
slaves to steepled call and sour necessity
though just a name without dimensions
that street stayed in memory - i never
asked if she revisited its floor, to mark, in
sight and memory, the window she's have
learned to view a city's trade from, stairs
down which she's go in convoy to their
weekly observances, the shops, and on
that final day, with aunt, to make the long
road back to what her child called home

the deadline will be met

the dead-
line will be met, although
it's not the most comfortable
place to work, this
hammock slung between
woodworm-pitted posts that call
themselves mortality and memory

you have to want to choose which
way to lean
and having seen
that there's a way to set your line
your answer must be - sew
your name into the fabric of that
sheet and trust its durability
to keep you going
while you reach out
through such blurred unknowns
and drizzled crags
as must be travelled yet

how the radio reports

in my silence i hear the radio
report on weathers, wars
applying its wise wizardry to
fact and incident, as if all it
had to say was absolutely
yes exactly as, although
in any rationality you always
must remind yourself it has
to make its choices - listen
for the questions not being
asked of those persuasive
voices of inferred authority

reflect on how your vision of
the world is formed by nimble
absences that being un-
declared are not required to
have a resonant existence
which could then be asked if
it might justify its less than
manifest dark presence in
this uncertain wish to scratch
and scrutinise what's spoken
softly in chill trigonometries
that give their validation to
such brightly gilded groves
as *those who speak* can use
to hide their valent power in
for every syllable you hear
there is a shadow sound, to
measure which you must have
access to an unmutated lexicon

you know there are clear truths
behind a hedge of grammars -
bring your parsing scythe and
hope to strip the message clean
and unequivocally there, as is
as is

it was home

returning here, from which a part of me
has never really been away, i realise it is
a place where this, the *i* i am, has never
really been
the gravestones up behind
the road remind me there were always
strangers in dark suits and voices burying
their dead, whenever i came back to visit
family and friends and each time fewer,
fewer, faces told me, wordlessly, just how
wrong i was to manifestly follow such an
ungrammatically ordered path, and even
if it brought me journeys out across clear
airways, into irresistibly fluent narratives
of sound, taste, colour they could never
dream of, still they've measured me as
wearing leaden boots which drag me out
from where the light they follow radiates
but when i see that loose fluorescence,
there are clouds around it, querulous in
density, that resonate with contradiction -
i'd rather not be there - while dialectics
may be fun, this dialogue might weave
between the certainties of cirrus, stratus
cumulus, nimbus, cumulonimbus, and if
the rain has cleared, a nacreous cloud
might drape its benign mother-of-pearl
glow round this - that we agree to differ
at day's end - that doesn't take me back
except when
still remembering those stony
lachrymose polemics cleaving rooms then
sending riven child and parent into not quite
rational divergent roads, it doesn't seem as
if, except the scars, the bruises felt, that
never show
i'd like to be able to walk the
same (as if deer-hoofed - that narrow) lip
above the unseen waterfall that told its own
fictions, singing danger, there being always
the possibility of falling, though the meshy
tangle of hazel wands offering a safest net
through which you could not fall, from which
you'd in their time pick sweet happy harvests

Poems by Colin Will

Pictish

I'm a Pict who doesn't want to be painted,
who says no thanks to the tattoo man's needles,
who has never sat on a horse in battle, swung a sword
or shot arrows in anger,
who believes the time for raiding cattle
was long ago, and in another country,
who knows none who died at Mons Graupius,
who could not translate Columba's Gaelic,
but who does not speak the old Brythonic tongue either,
who has no Irish ancestry, no Q-Celtic connections,
who did not carve Sueno's Stone, or any other,
who does not have red hair, but is a carrier,
who has never watched Brave Heart, nor ever will,
who is not a Mormaer, broch-builder, crannog-dweller,
who likes Pictish art and imagery, has a silver ring,
whose family came from the land of Ce, but
who knows nothing of the land of Ce,
except it is good farming country,
who knows the hills and straths of his forebears,
and loves them, but does not want to live there,
who feels a kinship with those who work the fields
and tend the beasts, but that's as far as it goes,
who knows no standard to which he will rally,
who believes a people is not a country,
who knows a country is an economic and political unit,
subject to change, and it has, and it will,
who will not stand up for a national anthem,
but who gets misty hearing Caledonia,
who knows that the Pict lands are not in the Highlands,
strictly speaking, and that his family
were never in a kilt-wearing clan but wears one anyway,
who thinks Sir Walter Scott has a lot to answer for,
who likes his morning porridge, but puts sugar on it,
who is still coming to terms with being outed as a Pict
by his DNA, a specific marker in all his cells,
who is as confused by this as by everything else.

Hare on Beinn Dorain

I'm skylined, head above the ridge,
watching a two-leg approach the hilltop.
You have to keep an eye and both ears
on them, but this one's going into winter,
hair snowed, breathing hard, slow.

I sniff, whisker-twitch, but smell no dog,
no bang-stick. He stops – I know it's a he –
folds onto a rock, takes his back off,
easts something I haven't smelled before, drinks
bitter, steaming water.
Do I crouch? Do I run? No, he couldn't catch me.

The black birds fly close, tumble, croak.
No eagle today, but I am brown
as heather stems, lying low, still.
Sweet grass here, and the morning rain
washed off the sheep piss. I like it here.

Where I am today

The sun has brought out the first crocuses,
Cream Beauty and a pale purple one, in the patch
of municipal grass where the dogs shit,
where the lollipop woman parks her bike,
over the wall from the hotel that closed
two years ago and remains shuttered.

Clouds scud, as clouds do, in a mild south-easter.
Cumulus. I never learned to classify clouds
but the highest ones, pale streaks against blue,
are ice crystals smeared by the jetstream.
My sore back is easing, and this walk will do me good.

I like the way my cosy scarf, a present from my son
I know his wife chose, whips round my neck,
streams out to the side. It's quite gusty,
force 5 or 6, I reckon, and offshore.
Incoming rollers have their tops sheared off
in spray, and the swell is flattened. Out where
the oil tankers park it's kicking up a bit of white.

In my garden the clump of snowflakes looks promising
but the Buddleia stems I didn't dead-head last year
are shaking their fists at me. Soon be time to prune
them.
Some plants haven't seen a winter this year,
flowered all the way through, but it's nice to see
something fresh. A first fly just went past.

Holding pattern

Some kind of delay before take-off,
an under-estimate of landing rigmaroles,
passport control – the barriers politicians
put between people – baggage reclaim
and the obligatory airside toiletings,
mean we're far too early for the family.

I'm wondering, since it's a couple of years
between visits, how much the children
have changed, how they'll react.
And then they come through,
son pushing overloaded trolley,
daughter-in-law smiling, grandson shy.

But my granddaughter sees us, shouts
and starts to run. She leaps into my arms
snuggles her head into my neck,
breathes against me. As I turn her
to and fro I see smiles and moist eyes
on the faces of bystanders,
little ripples of remembered joys.

Into the trees

There's one that stands
at the junction of two paths.
It's an old walnut, too isolated from its kind
to bear nuts. Most branches are dead and leafless,
but still held out, upturned,
to take the sun's blind gift.

As for the paths, you can do the Frost thing,
but they both circle round, come back
to where they started, choose or don't choose.

Coming over the pass after the track to Ben Lawers,
the narrow road winds down into Glen Lyon
and there, I swear, is a gorgeous tract
of old growth pine, a remnant of the Boreal.
Close by, by the old cemetery, is Europe's oldest,
the Fortingall Yew, conferring immortality on the dead
escorted between its rejuvenating trunks.

Over in the west, the old oaks of Argyll
must share their glens with bunkers
where warheads are stored, symbols for the failure
of goodwill, but their protection
is cleaner, more generous to life, and outlasts
the silly words of politics.

Big is impressive, granted. Walking among giants
you can't help lifting your eyes, but the smaller ones,
the first arrivals, birch, rowan, aspen, carpeted
the emerging land, gave shelter for the seeds
of life, as the ice retreated, and hazel nourished
the first folk to venture north, settle,
put down roots.

Bringing Us Back To Earth

Stuart B Campbell celebrates the poetry of Nan Shepherd

In The Cairngorms has been out of print since it was published in 1934; Galileo Publishers should be commended for making it available again. It must rank as one of the most significant collections of Scottish poetry and its author, Nan Shepherd, should be celebrated as one of our most important poets.

Nan Shepherd was born in 1893 and lived all her life in Cults, now a suburb of Aberdeen. She attended Aberdeen High School for Girls. After graduating MA from the University of Aberdeen in 1915, she lectured in English at Aberdeen Training Centre for Teachers and taught there until her retirement in 1956. She died in 1981. It was while at secondary school that Nan Shepherd began writing poetry and she went on to publish some whilst at university. *In The Cairngorms* was written during and in the aftermath of WW1.

Nan Shepherd was a friend of Willa Muir and regularly corresponded with Neil Gunn; and she championed the work of Charles Murray, Marion Angus and Jessie Kesson. Shepherd published three novels: The *Quarry Wood* (1928); *The Weatherhouse* (1930); and *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933). Being aware of her contemporaries helps put her writing in context. DH Lawrence published *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the same year as Shepherd published *The Quarry Wood*, that year also saw Virginia Woolf's *Orlando;* Hugh MacDiarmid's *Stony Limits* was published the same year as *In The Cairngorms*. Between 1932 and 1934 Lewis Grassic Gibbon published *A Scots Quair*. Both writers came from and set their novels in the north-east, but a distinction needs to be made between comparing the writers and comparing their work. Arguably, Shepherd's female protagonists are just as strong as Chris Guthrie in *A Scots Quair*, but although Shepherd had become part of the Scottish Renaissance, she was nonetheless a woman writing in what was very much a man's world. The inherent gender imbalance of 20th century publishing and criticism, however, resulted in Gibbon's work continuing to be read while Shepherd's became neglected. Her novels are available (from Canongate), published along with *The Living Mountain* (her only non-fiction book) as *The Grampian Quartet*.

Arguably *The Living Mountain* is out of place being bundled with the novels; it is really a companion piece to *In The Cairngorms.* Nan Shepherd wrote *The Living Mountain* thirteen years after publishing *In The Cairngorms,* though it was not published until 1977. Nan Shepherd is recognised increasingly today due to this small book, not her poetry or novels. Climber/writer Jim Perrin said it was 'The finest book ever written on nature and landscape in Britain'. That is only partially correct. In *The Living Mountain* Nan Shepherd does more than describe the Cairngorms; she tries to convey the effect and affect of being in the mountains. It is a prose book written by a poet, sometimes pushing the limits of words, trying to make sense of experience. *The Living Mountain* can be read as an extension of the issues explored in *In The Cairngorms* and it's now possible to read both books in the order in which they were written and published; the concentration of the poetry gives clarity to the prose.

All but a few of the poems are written in three or four line stanzas, with an unobtrusive end rhyme and are carried by a strong rhythmical voice. Given the era in which these poems were written, the capitalisation of the first letter of each line can make reading the poems initially a little difficult for the modern eye. Similarly, there are a few words, like 'doth' and 'be't', that now seem quite archaic. Surprisingly, only a few of the poems are written in Doric. We can assume that Doric would have been second nature for Nan Shepherd, but we can only speculate as to why she did not use that language more. She also reveals a working knowledge of Gaelic: In the poem 'The Hill Burns', the colours of the 'green' and 'amber', burns are translations of the Gaelic names of actual burns in the Cairngorms.

The Cairngorms is the largest continuous area of ground above 1000 meters in Britain, a vast subarctic plateau, 'where the forces of nature work with a power and a violence undreamed of at lower heights' (Scottish Mountaineering Club guidebook). Winter changes everything out of all recognition. This was the environment into which Nan Shepherd entered. She also entered into a domain that was peopled mostly by white upper-class males; gentlemen with beards and hairy breeches. In the early years of the 20th century few people visited the mountains, far less women; that she made solo trips makes her, for her time, exceptional. Despite the cover photograph showing a young lady that would not be out of place in the drawing room of Downton Abbey, Nan Shepherd was, physically and mentally, a tough cookie.

Travelling in the mountains, Shepherd was taking risks that were objective and physical, but also psychological. Shepherd conveys to the reader 'That awful loneliness' of 'this grey plateau, rock strewn, vast, silent'. It is an environment that can be emotionally crushing in its proportions. As a counterpoint to that 'world of eternal annihilation', Shepherd often delights in small features: a burn is a 'glass-white shiver, / Singing over stone', but it is the quality of the light that she most rejoices in 'Light swum between the mountains / […] Light was the principle of their making'. Shepherd's engagement with nature is essentially physical. The Cairngorms blow away any notion that the world is a construct of the mind. Shepherd claimed it is possible to live 'a life of the senses so pure […] that the body may be said to think'. This is close to what contemporary neuroscientists describe as 'our embodied selves'. When she says 'I had looked into the abyss', Shepherd means both physically and metaphysically. Having looked into that 'unfathomable void', the question for Shepherd is how to live authentically. In this there are echoes of Shelley's Mont Blanc.

Beyond her immediate perception, Shepherd also sensed 'some keen order of existence', a world 'with meanings missed before'. That 'oceanic' feeling is not uncommon amongst climbers, as W H Murray discussed in 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen'. Shepherd, too, speaks of phenomena that are 'Unseen, unheard, yet all beside us,/And co-existent with our own,/That shines through ours at quickened moments'. Shepherd's poetry succeeds in conveying an impression of such moments. If that all seems a little bit too mystical to us (both she and Murray were influenced by Zen Buddhism), the possibility of experiencing the world more fully was for Shepherd as much a spiritual proposition as a physiological one.

This collection, however, is in three parts; the second acts as a bridge between the mountain poems and the third which contains eleven love poems all in sonnet form. Nan Shepherd never married and it is not known for whom these poems were written. In his foreword Robert Macfarlane warns against, 'identifying the speaker of these 'bruised and oblique' sonnets as Shepherd herself'', but it is difficult to read these as being entirely imaginary, or written from second-hand experience. The poems are astonishing for their honesty and astounding in their depth of feeling. They read as if when Shepherd encountered love, it was as immense, as unimaginable, as the Cairngorm massif: 'I am mazed to find my world/sore altered in the passing night […] no hurricane swirled./But at morn the earth was strange, a blur, white'. Despite the fact that these poems are written out of the disintegration of a relationship, she has the emotional tenacity to persevere with what love is. For her the break-up is 'Pure pain, pure loss, destructive, sore', but needs to confront that pain, 'let us recognize the thing'; and not devalue it with: 'easy comfort to allow/ '*Tis not so bad as once we thought* / Will not devitalise us now'. Despite the hurt of her experience, Shepherd acknowledges the necessity of love in order to be wholly human: 'We are love's body, or we are undone'. These are supremely powerful poems.

Modern outdoor equipment does not significantly diminish the objective risks inherent in travelling in the mountains, though it can anaesthetise them. That primeval part of our psyche will still respond to real wilderness in the same way as it did for Nan Shepherd. Yet, many people engaged in outdoor pursuits now seem almost oblivious to the fact they are in a mountain environment. To them being on a mountain is the means to an end; the mountains are a playground to be utilised for recreation. Nan Shepherd, however, talks of 're-creation'; for her the mountains were restorative, healing and life enhancing. In an age when the virtual world is increasingly taken to be more real than the actual, we really need poets like Nan Shepherd to bring us back to the earth. Eighty years after it was first published, *In The Cairngorms* continues to be relevant. ■

In The Cairngorms is published by Galileo Publishers, Cambridge. An extended version of this article can be found in the Northwords Now website reviews section.

Poetry

Under This Sky
Irene Cunningham

The planet holds lochs, suffers
wind to make waves, snow
to cap our mountains and sun to
warm my shoulders.

Fern, the barking dog-star, shouts
at me, begs my attention
until I'm full of the world – she beats
my back, haranguing me
for a bloody stone...
my son's fashionable jeans slip.
He moons us.

I worry about the universe.

Mamma
Kathrine Sowerby

The shower drips
into the lukewarm bath
in the room between rooms
tiled from floor to ceiling.

The sink—pink enamel,
droplets of condensation.
A votive candle glows red—
a cut out crescent moon.

She waits for flickers on
the bulge of her stomach.
Waves lifting, sinking
her head under the water.

Muffled music
playing somewhere.

Commonplaces
Yvonne Marjot

Daffodils whipped by an arctic northerly.
Walking backwards. The year's first camper
Van. Practising for the Mòd. The first lamb.
Blackthorn hedges. Whitecaps on the Bay.

A sea of blue depths and white sails.
Campsite barbecues. Football on the sand:
One Sassenach, five Scots and an Argentinian.
Mergansers on the loch. Sunburn. Hail.

Hills painted green and mauve like a healing bruise.
Clouds heavy as hangovers. Driving rain.
A merlin cruising the landscape. Geese in skeins.
Boats straining their moorings. Dark day blues.

Chimney fires. Uisge beatha. Afterglow.
Mince and tatties contest. Cancelled ferries. Snow.

Diathan Ròmach
Julian Ronay

Blàths is ceileireadh
dealan-dè agus seillean
nas mìlse na mil
nas aotruime na lus–chlòimh
guthan gaoth is ceòl
a' measgachadh

le deàrrsadh na grèine
air mo chraiceann
gabhaidh mi ceum
lomnochd tron doire
agus thèid mi fodha
a-steach dhan ùir
a-nuas domhainn

anns a' choille
chunna mi thu
airson mòmaid
molach is teth

oir thog thu mo chridh'
agus tholl thu mi
thug thu orm
a phlosgadh

beathach naomh
stealladh-sil
tuainealach a' dannsadh
fear èibhneach

Dàn
Coinneach Lindsay

Chunnaic mi a-raoir thu
Geal mar bhruadar
Marbh mar ghaol

Bird tongues
Vicki Husband

in a wood panelled back room drawers
are lined with bird skins: a neat flock
filed in rows of holotype, wings folded
flat, feet tied with string, labelled, eyes
stitched shut. But two beaks left ajar

so bird tongues wag

tell tales of blossom that smelt like
rotten meat, insects that fought back
or weighed them down dangerously
low, winds seeded with gunshot, birds
disappearing into flower heads

swallowed whole like a song

Lowland Autumn
Audrey Henderson

Everything raised itself hard and durable
in our bare-knuckle air, blunt root crops,
watertight cabbages grew in rows
behind the school. Pigeons raced
by men who worked the seam sheared
sideways into the wind. We carved
boulder-sized turnips at Halloween
twisting our table spoons. In October
the fields burned, a red line between straw
and cinder, the men digging underneath.

For my sister, who went to Guayaquil
Hugh Mcmillan

Guayaquil,
to hear my mother,
was the whorehouse
at the end of the universe,
the frontier town you see
in films, with stubbled men
and showgirls and nightly
shoot-outs in the street.
'Gone to Guayaquil'
was mother-speak
for gone to fuck,
beyond all sense and morality.
I on the other hand
thought it good you'd gone
to Guayaquil, imagined
you sipping daiquiris
in the colonnaded shade
of an ex-colonial house
while the ocean shone
silver to the horizon.
Imagine my surprise then,
when you came back
with that strange tattoo,
and pregnant, and told her
she was absolutely right.

Killer Heels and Cut Throats

Tanera Bryden interviews crime novelist Alex Gray

An engaging Nairn Book and Arts Festival (2-7 September) is full of contrast this year; visiting authors include Kirsty Wark, Kapka Kassabova, Sally Magnusson and Peter Ross, and subjects under discussion include tango dancing in Buenos Aires, island life on Lewis, the afterlife of a body snatcher, and gruesome deaths on the streets of modern-day Glasgow.

The Festival's 'Wine and Crime' afternoon features a trio of writers: Ann Cleeves won the inaugural Duncan Lawrie Dagger in 2006, for her novel *Raven Black*, and her books have formed the basis for two television series so far - *Shetland (BBC Scotland)* and *Vera (ITV)*. Ann is joined by rising star Malcolm Mackay; born and raised on Lewis, this young writer, fêted by the critics for his convincing portraits of the inhabitants of Glasgow's underbelly, wrote his forensically researched books from his bedroom in Stornoway. His first book *The Necessary Death of Lewis Winter*, was shortlisted for the Scottish First Book of the Year, and the second, *How A Gunman Says Goodbye*, won the Deanston Scottish Crime Book of the Year Award. Completing the trio of writers is Alex Gray, author of a series of eleven crime novels featuring Detective Chief Inspector Lorimer, the latest of which is *The Bird That Did Not Sing*. The twelfth book in the series is due out next year.

TB Your first published story, at age 9, was for *Bunty,* after your primary school teacher predicted you would become a novelist. You have said that when you were a child, thanks to the library books your older sister brought home, your fairy tales were the Greek Myths and Nathaniel Hawthorn's *Tanglewood Tales*. What books would you recommend to children now?

AG The books I would recommend to children now would, of course, depend on their ages but anything by Julia Donaldson is wonderful for tinies and early school age children while teens must discover the wonderful books by Catherine MacPhail like *Run Zan Run*. The books I loved like works by JRR Tolkien still stand the test of time as do so many fairy tales but I do think that Philip Pullman's *Golden Spyglass* trilogy is also enthralling. I would also tell kids not to miss out on classics like the Narnia stories or Winnie the Pooh and books like *Alice in Wonderland* or *Little Women* and of course *Treasure Island*. There are so many great books out there that I would urge kids to haunt their local library as I did myself.

TB You wrote your first book while holidaying on Mull; do you still sometimes retreat to the Hebrides to write?

AG Not only do I retreat to the Hebrides to write, Mull is strongly featured in my next book, *Keep The Midnight Out*. It is like a second home to me but I have to cadge beds from relatives who live there, bless them!

TB You are very musical; you played guitar and were a founder member of the Battlefield Band; you have been a folk singer, and a choral singer who has sung at Chartres Catherdral. Your fourth novel, *The Riverman*, was the subject of a choral symphony by composer, Ken Walton, who took some of the words from the book for his work, *Colours of the Clyde*. How did it feel to have your work inspire a piece of music? Has anyone else expressed an interest in doing something similar, and would you consider composing something yourself?

AG I was both honoured and humbled to listen to my own words transformed into choral music. Yes, I would consider something like that again if there were any parts of my work that lent themselves to music but it would be a collaboration rather than a composition by myself, I think.

TB The city of Glasgow has been central to a huge range of crime fiction and TV drama, and home to some of crime's great characters, from Taggart and Cracker, to Malcolm Mackay's Calum MacLean, and your own charismatic creation, DCI Lorimer. Why do you think so much successful crime writing is inspired by, and set in, Glasgow?

AG I think Glasgow epitomises the dichotomy of a warm hearted city that can turn to violence in a moment like a sunny summer's day blanketed by a deluge of heavy rain. I love the people of Glasgow and lament the darker side that exists in their lives. Perhaps that contrast is what underlies so much of the crime writing we have in Glasgow. Maybe many cities are like this? And perhaps it is indicative of the human condition that we present a civilised exterior over the potential for violence that hides underneath.

TB Can you tell us a little bit about the *Femmes Fatales* writing trio you set up with Alanna Knight and Lin Anderson , and how it came about?

AG *Femmes Fatales* came about as Lin and Alanna and I are all friends and decided we would follow the lead of other groups in the Crime Writers Association who give talks. We wanted to showcase women's crime writing in particular and we blend so well as a trio that audiences always enjoy our events. We liked the notion of painting our nails scarlet and donning killer heels as well, of course!!!

TB You founded Bloody Scotland – now, within a couple of short years, an incredibly successful crime writing festival. Do you think that Scots writers have a particular bent for crime fiction, and what do you think makes them embrace it?

AG This is a question I am often asked, particularly since the overwhelming success of Bloody Scotland. I think we have great writers in Scotland full stop. Yes, many of us seem to have a particular desire to use the genre to express our feelings about the world around us, usually in terms of contemporary fiction. I think dear Willie McIlvanney showed us the way with the *Laidlaw* trilogy, allowing us all to follow him into darker realms of fiction than, perhaps, the writers of literary fiction do not always enter. Do we have a darkness to our nature? Like the Scandinavians, do we endure these long winter nights brooding on the vagaries of the human condition? Perhaps. I do not think there is one answer, but many. Perhaps there is a book to be written to explore this issue!!

TB You have said that you very much admire PD James. Which other writers, living or dead, have influenced you most?

AG Yes I continue to admire PD James. As a young writer in my teens I loved the Russians especially Dostoevsky and expect that their work was an influence at that time. I devoured the detective fiction of the Golden Age as a young woman, mostly for their absorbing story lines and twisty plots. I think Ian Rankin influenced me inasmuch as he was writing about a detective in Edinburgh and I was writing about Lorimer in Glasgow (I didn't come across his work until I had written a couple of books myself) and so I felt a bit inspired to continue my own series. I don't think I am really influenced by other writers' ideas or styles at all although I read voraciously, especially crime fiction.

TB Is it really true that you have had your throat cut?

AG Yes it is quite true that I had my throat cut but I was under anaesthetic at the time and I had given the surgeon my permission to carry out the operation to remove my thyroid. It had wrapped itself around my windpipe and grown so large that it was in danger of impeding my heart and lungs! Later on I found that there had been a second thoracic surgeon on standby as the op might have become a bit tricky. Sadly my singing voice has never been quite the same. I was sorry the newspapers missed a great chance for a headline: Crime Writer Has Her Throat Cut! ■

Alex Gray will appear at the Nairn Book and Arts Festival on Saturday 6th September 2014. For full programme details and to book tickets, visit **www.nairnfestival.co.uk.**

John Glenday
39 Comments on the Creative Process

To begin at the very end: their own finished work is often far more surprising to the poet than the new work of others.

§

Inspiration is the accumulated shadow of all the things we will never be able to say. Thank goodness.

§

Always remember to begin the poem after the beginning; that politeness, that clearing of the throat.

§

Lowell remarked that belief in God is an inclination to listen. Listen: the world is telling us about the world – write down what it is saying. All great poetry is dictation.

§

If it doesn't wither, it's probably not a suitable subject for poetry.

§

A viewpoint is usually more interesting than a point of view.

§

The great thing about form is that it hinders us from saying what we had originally intended to say.

§

Love the poem for its roots, as Vallejo almost said, rather than it's flower.

§

The self must be expunged from the poem - or at least scrupulously concealed - so that the reader has enough elbow room to discover themselves in it. In this respect the poem is ruthlessly selfish.

§

We need to remember that Silence has been given all the best lines. The revision process is a difficult trek back towards a point as close to silence as language will allow.

§

Am I the only one who finds Auden's statement that 'poetry makes nothing happen' utterly positive and invigorating? Poetry involves giving nothing a voice. Notice he didn't write that poetry doesn't make anything happen.

§

The creative process begins with the need to exist, not to express. Poems come from pens, not ideas.

§

The eye does not see things, it only sees change.

§

Consciousness is all. Consciousness of vision. Consciousness of experience. Even when we sleep, the poem in us is awake.

§

The tone of the poem comes first, then its outline against the page, then the words, and finally, perhaps, the meaning.

§

Who was it said the docken grows next to the nettle? The cure is always a neighbour to the cause. So look beside the cliché for its solution; search for the remarkable in the shadow of the ordinary.

§

To allow the poem to enter us we need only open our eyes, our ears, our hands. Mankind is so practiced in not seeing the world. We generalise in order to accommodate its vastness and variety. We see a thing once, and forever after we are blind to its existence.

§

To generalise is to dismiss. If the poem is to have any chance of success it must reduce the subject matter to its lowest uncommon denominator. One person is a human being; everything beyond that, a faceless crowd.

§

Because we have been granted everything, we can take nothing for granted.

§

Virchoff described illness as 'life under altered conditions'. Poetry is too. The creative process is essentially the process of disease. The moment before the poem begins is a time of unease – of discomfort, elation, fever. Something is looming. And then the symptoms kick in – a few words scribbled down on paper because they sound good, or interesting, though they lack meaning. A single line that persists like an earworm and demands exploration.

§

Likewise the fomites of poetry – the physical things that carry the disease between person and person – are those physical things embedded in the poem which carry the sickness known as meaning. Bacteria and viruses cannot be spread by thought or ideas; likewise the germ of the poem needs concrete items to transport it between individuals, like smallpox folded in a woollen blanket.

§

All poetry, of course, arises out of silence. In this respect it is a nihil ex machina.

§

After the first couple of drafts, my process is one of dogged redaction, of removing any elements which identify the poem as mine, and returning it as close to that original silence as possible. My second most favourite writing utensil is the delete button.

§

As the poem arises, the feeling is one of liberating sadness. Sad things make me content, not because I crave sadness, but because they accord. For the same reason, I abhor circus clowns, dancing, merry tunes.

§

The great secret that the writer must conceal from their public is the enormity of their theft from others. I thieve from Literature. I thieve from Art. I thieve from Nature. I take someone else's words and rearrange them to reflect my contemporary concerns. Donne, I think, noted that young men don't mend their sight by wearing old men's spectacles. Perhaps not, but they're always stealing their pens.

§

Everything has been said before. But as Gide noted, no one was listening, so we must continually say it all again, with an altered accent, or a different tone, or a new perspective, in the hope that this time, at long last, someone will hear us, or at least ignore us differently.

§

Though the process is involuntary, it can be encouraged. If I want to run a marathon, I'll jog every day to improve my lung function and muscle tone and endurance. If I want to write, I should practice accordingly. What I write is often less important than the act of writing. Put another way, the preparation for writing is to write.

§

Nothing stays nothing.

§

All humanity requires a hook to snag against the world, a way of engaging with it, or avoiding engagement with it. We search for familiarity and patterning, for shapes in the constellations, for Jesus' face in our soup. In this respect everything we see is filled with significance for us, because we are empty, because we are insignificant.

§

If I were to compare poetry to the Sciences, I would suggest that it was most like Archaeology in that both disciplines concentrate on the apparent detritus of life, but are actually interested in rediscovering how life is lived. Archaeology is of course a science of the present day which pretends to be interested in the way people lived many years ago. Poetry pretends to be interested in the physical things of life – the potsherd, the bone fragment, the bronze arrowhead, but it is actually interested in the hand behind the arrowhead, the face that wore the bone, the lips that drank the mead from that broken pot.

§

As a Science, Poetry is remarkably perverse. It has been said that Science gave much to poetry but poetry gave nothing at all to Science. I disagree, of course. Poetry gives process to Science, if not content. Poetry gave Kekulé the dream that became the benzene ring; it gave Dirac the desire for elegance which led to mathematical proofs.

§

Sometimes I suggest changes to a poem and the student replies in horror: 'But that's not what happened!' To which I reply 'Well it has happened now…'

§

Every good poem has an angle of refraction, as though it were composed in clear water. We appear to read straight into the poem, but the meaning angles off crookedly, to allow us to see what we are not seeing.

§

Look at that dim star. It is only visible when we look slightly to one side, so that its light falls on the more sensitive elements of the eye. This is averted vision. The poem also looks to one side of its subject matter. Abstractions are so dim they are all but unknown to us.

§

You can usually tell from the title what a poem is not about.

§

Always do your best to stop writing once the poem is finished. It is such a temptation to sum up, to spill the beans, to reiterate. Leave that to the reader.

§

Because each poem, ultimately, is a failure, we constantly consider giving it all up, of resigning ourselves to the white silence.

§

Because each poem, ultimately is a failure, we write on.

§

If you are satisfied the poem is finished, you've probably said too much.

Poetry by John Glenday

X Ray

So this is outer space,
this filmy sheet of black
blemished with stars?

That grinning moon
is balanced on a milky haze
of cloud, snagged in the thousand

branches of a bare
white tree. But these
are nothing - nothing's marks,

pauses for thought,
the interstices, the junctures
at which something slowed

and thickened as it made
its way through her. Surely
this speaks of a wilful

hesitancy - interest even?
For want of the proper science
we should call that love.

Two Ravens

for D, and for S.

If I were given a choice, I would become that bird
Noah first sent out to gauge the Flood;

but I would never come back. I would never
come back because I would find another

just like me, and the two of us, casting ourselves for shadows
would sweep on like a thought and its answer over depths and shallows

and never rest until the last waves had unfurled;
beating our wings against the absence of the world.

Fable

Remember that old tale
of the half-blind angel
fell in love with herself
in a frozen pool?

'Tell me;' she whispers,
'tell me your name,
more smoke of skin
or skein of hair than man.

Love is the self dissolved.
Lift up the mirror
of my face to your face
and you'll see nothing.'

Monster

I miss it terribly - family and everything.
Father in that lab coat fathers wear;
always too close, always too distant,

always too keen. You may have heard –
my mother was the product of unmentionable
absences and storms; my siblings

a tick list of slack, discarded failures.
We are all born adult and unwise.
Don't judge me too harshly.

Which of us was not coddled into life
by love's uncertain weathers? Are we not
all stitched together and scarred?

Step forward anyone who can swear
they are not a thing of parts.

Lest We Forget*

Peder Ås · Tommy Atkins · Chichiko Bendeliani · Joe Bloggs · Jane Doe · Jäger Dosenkohl-Haumichblaue · Fulan al Fulani · Kari Holm · Hong Gildong · Aamajee Gomaajee Kaapse · Kovacs Janos · Janina Kowlaska · Sari Çizmeli Mehmet Aga · Madame Michu · Jan Modaal · Erika Mustermann · Numerius Negidius · No Nominado · Nguyen · Van A · Seán Ó Rudaí · A N Other · Vardenis Pavardenis · Pera Peric · Petar Petrov · JefVan Pijperzete · Juan Piguave · Ion Popescu · Vasiliy Pupkin · Imya Rek · Mario Rossi · Joe Shmoe · Maria da Silva · Lisa Medel-Svensson · Sicrana de Tal · Tauno Tavallinen · Manku Thimma · Wang Wu · Moishe Zugmir

**List not exhaustive*

Poetry

Fàistneachd
Eoghan Stewart

Dhùisg mi aon oidhche
oir thàinig fàistneachd orm.
Na mo shealladh, thàinig trom-làighe beò
far am faca mi tràighean is machraichean,
achaidhean is pàircean Leòdhais
gun shrann cnapaig a' seirm,
gun ghleus a' bhuille bhinn a' seinn,
gun ghairmean àghmhor nan gillean
air toir a' bhuaidh mar na mìltean romhpa.
Chaidh na balaich dhan sgoil gun chamain
an cois am fàdan is an leabhraichean-gràmair.
Chunnaic mi na maidean gan sadail
gu cùl pris, am measg nan cabar,
gu bonn ciste, gu cùl inntinn.
'S cruinn mhòr na h-àite
's òigridh a' magadh air an t-seann fheadhainn
a chum suas a' Challainn mar a bha riamh.
Far nach deach a h-aithneachadh na dùthaich fhèin
ged nach bu chian bhon a dh'fhalbh i.
Mhothaich mi gur bu mhise a bha nam chadal
's b' e mo mhuinntir-sa a bha air dùsgadh.

'Fàistneachd' was the overall Gaelic Poetry winner for the 2013 Baker Prize.

Cuireadh Pìobaire
Deborah Moffatt

Is fada bhon uair a dh'fhàg mi i,
agus is fad' on a chuala mi bhuaipe,
ach thàinig a' ghairm, agus thill mi thuice.

Is fad' an oidhche a chaith mi rithe
gun ach ceòl bochd na pìoba
gar cumail ri chèile.

Bha briseadh-dùil aig an dithis againn,
mo cheòl coigreach, cearbach, ga cràdh,
mise gam chronachadh fhèin,

a h-uile rud a' teicheadh orm,
mo mheòir gun lùths, gun fheum,
na puirt a' traoghadh às mo chuimhne,

agus eadarainn, dùthaich chaillte, na laighe
ann an meadhan a' chuain, a' dol à sealladh,
agus sinne gar dalladh le faoin-aisling.

Truagh an latha a dh'fhàg mi i,
ach nas truaighe fhathast mo thilleadh,
dìomhanas cuireadh pìobaire.

'Cuireadh Pìobaire' was the runner up for Gaelic Poetry for the 2013 Baker Prize.

The Log-splitter
Derek Crook

A puffing carrier dragged it to our door
In a box shaped like a cardboard coffin.
And cardboard – and of course a coffin-
Is, we'll agree I hope, made from trees.

A heavy steel frame, painted black and red
(You wonder why and then concede that
Not everyone worries about colour
Or searches for a symbolism. Mainly poets
When they think about their poetry, which
They should try not to do too often.)

One end has a mounted wedge. The other end
A piston – hydraulic – mean anything to you?
Me neither. You place a loglet on the frame
And pump the handles. The piston crawls
With persistent menace to the log,
Squeezes that loglet up against the wedge.
You follow me?

Thirty years of more or less
Concentric life creaks, cracks
And falls in two.

Intersection, Inverness
Lydia Popowich

Alone, I wait for the green
light at a T junction. In my rear view

mirror, mother and daughter, blonde curls, matching
smiles, laughing, chatting, trading

glances, milky eyed reflections of one
another, safe as air bubbles in fused

glass; on their way home from Asda or ballet or violin
class or fish and chips with grandma after swimming

or Maeve's birthday party and the promise of girl
guiding. The lights change, I turn

away from the crimson
city, away from the sighs of cherry blossom

in the ranked rows of trees on the riverside
as petals freeze to pink ice in the chill.

Jackdaw Down
Simon Berry

We thought we must have seen the worst of flats
When viewing, yet this black-on-black made us stop:
A shock of sootfall radiated from the hearth
The bird's spread wings amongst it simulating flight.

"It's just a jackdaw from the chimney" you declared
(ill-omened bird was what I thought but didn't say),
So you lifted and dusted the feathers with your hands
To make each dusky pinion suddenly new-fired.

Not a promising beginning, you'd think, nevertheless
We took a lease on that cottage right then and there.
The man who came to reconstruct the chimney said:
"These daws just keep returning to their native nests."

From the garden fence a pair looked on in black affront.
What reason could he give, then, for this winged metastasis?
"Aye, they build a platform for the nest by dropping sticks
As a sort of speculation down the stack. Some hold, some don't."

Hardly reassuring. I reasoned the daw's harsh tetchy clypes
And dusky quills were made to cut a figure in the air
Not for lingering down here in our pedestrian realm:
For this malign intrusion it had surely paid a hefty price.

So was I sorry for this lonely accidental death, as I supposed,
That it had failed to strut about our cottage space
Making the necessary accommodation for co-habiting?
Hell no, just intense relief to see those sequin eyes tight closed.

Dàin ùra le Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul

Rud

Thèid rud gu rud:
sìol gu craobh,
bratag gu dealan-dè,

agus turas rinn mi sgoth
a-mach à pìos maide agus luideag

‘s ged nach ionnan sin
ri fion à uisge

nach fheàrr e na obair ar là:
dèanamh uisge à fion?

M’ athair

Ghlac mi e dìreach aon turas,
a’ bheinn mhòr seo,
air a ghlùinean taobh na leapaidh
ag ùrnaigh.
Agus thuig mi
cò às a thàinig
mo neart.

An Àrd Sgoil

Sheas iad anns na trannsaichean
mar fheannagan dubha,

an cleòcaichean a’ sgiathadh
mun guailnean

a’ cuir eagal a’ bhàis oirnn,
a’ piocadh gach aisling

ach an aon aisling a b’ fhiach:
gun tigeadh latha na saorsa

far an seinneadh a’ churracag
àrd anns na speuran

agus na h-uain a’ mèilich
mar spìdeagan.

A Mhic

Tha mi gad shaoradh
o gach cuing a tha gad cheangal
ri nàisean, cànan, dualchas is sluagh.

O gach dàn fada ruitheamach Gàidhlig
a’ moladh nan cinn-cinnidhean.

O gach dual-chainnt is prìseile
anns a’ chruinne-chè.

O gach òran a’ moladh dùthaich,
màthair, ‘s am baile mar a bha.

O gach creud is cinnidh
o gach dùil is dòchas.

O chànan a shàbhaladh,
agus uallach teangaidh.

Bidh saor agus daonnda.

Mar Fhear na h-Eabaide,
ma dh’fheumas tu samhla,

a shiubhal an saoghal
airson gaol mnatha

‘s a choinnich Murchadh mac Briain
dhan do dh’inns e an sgeul.

Mac Iain ‘ic Sheumais
airson Ceana Chaimbeul

Nuair a chaidh an gaisgeach mòr
Mac Iain ‘ic Sheumais
a leòn aig Blàr na Fèithe
ghlaodh e airson a Mhamaidh
a thàinig sa bhad le bannal nam ban
‘s a rinn òran dha
a mhair fada na b’ fhaide na e fhèin.

Tha thu

Càr beag dearg a’ dol seachad
‘s chan eil thusa ann.

Plèan a’ sgiathadh àrd sna speuran
‘s chan eil thusa oirre.

Iat a’ gluasad gu socair sa Chuan Sgìth
‘s chan eil thus’ air bòrd.

Tha thu
far nach eil thu.

Factaraidh Fheamainn Bhaghasdail

A dh’aindeoin mo cheum
ann an Eachdraidh ‘s Poilitigs
cha do thuig mi buileach riamh
gum b’ e seo a bha Marx a’ ciallachadh:
gun robh latha cinnteach a’ tighinn
nuair bhiodh na fir a bha caicleadh
tarsainn a’ mhachaire le màileidean
air an dromannan nan eachdraidh
‘s gum biodh a’ ghaoth a’ sèideadh
tro sprùilleach na factaraidh seo.

An Taigh Cruinn, Dalabrog

An starsaich
far an do dh’èirich a’ ghrian.

An cidsin
ann an solas na maidne.

An t-àite-còmhnaidh
tron là.

An làr-caidil
sa chiaradh.

An seòmar-bàis
san dorchadas.

A’ dol deiseil
o mhoch gu dubh.

Beachd

Tha eun
a’ crochadh bun-os-cionn
taobh muigh m’ uinneig,
ag ithe chnòthan

agus madainn an-diugh
nochd ball-teine sna speuran

‘s nuair bha mi coiseachd dhachaigh a-raoir
chunna mi corran na gealaich,

agus smaoinich mi
air cho cinnteach ‘s a tha gràdh,
a’ gluasad an sin san adhar.

Beyond the C

Angus Dunn falls in lo

Photographs of Moniack Mhor and the Straw Bale Studio D

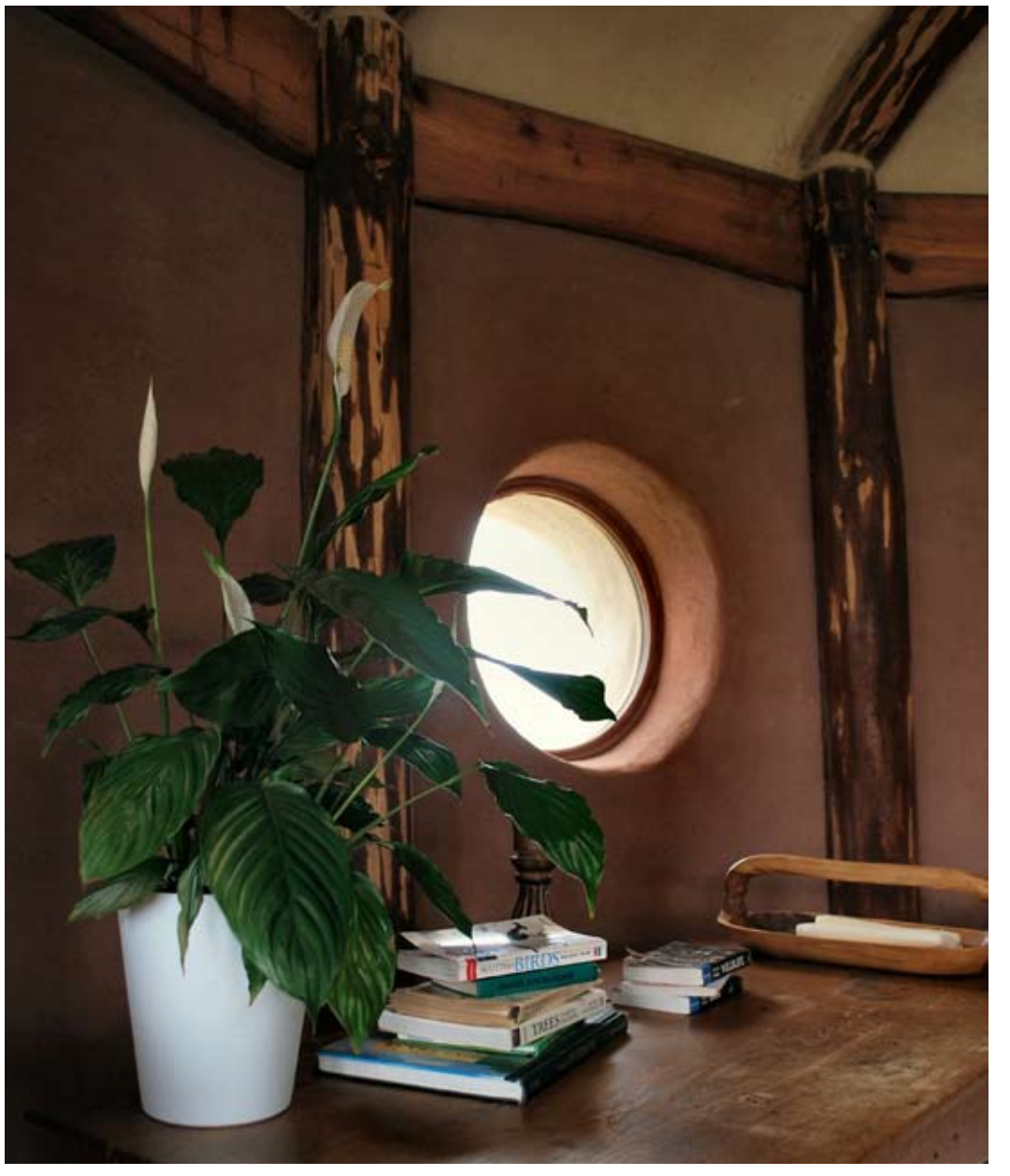
Twenty one years ago, Moniack Mhor Writers' Centre opened its doors. The development of a writers' centre in the Highlands was the brainchild of Kit and Sophia Fraser, and many writers throughout Scotland were involved in the fundraising. The 24-hour Poethon alone involved a couple of hundred poets. As a consequence, there are many of us who feel a special connection to this renovated croft house on the Teaverran hillside. It's not only a resource and a training ground, it's *our* resource.

The building, a few miles from Inverness, looks out west across the glen to where the road goes over the pass and across the moorland to Loch Ness. Towards the north, the massif of Ben Wyvis is visible, purple in the twilight, white with snow in the springtime. On some days one might say that the Centre has expansive views. At other times, it seems more accurate to say that it is exposed to the elements – but a thunderstorm working its way up the glen has its own drama and splendour. My first encounter with the finished Centre was in my capacity as a woodworker. I was called in to replace a damaged door in the kitchen. It had to be a strong door, since the winds across the hillside would slam an unattended door with force enough to split it and loosen the door frame.

In the two decades since that opening, Moniack Mhor has been visited by many – perhaps even most - of the writers currently working in the Highlands. They have attended as participants, as invited readers and as tutors. They have kept the place running as directors. There are many warm memories of the place and for many writers a course at Moniack was a step on their way to a writing career. For some, it was life-changing.

At the beginning, it was a shoestring operation, and it was thrown together in a flurry of good intentions, hard work and optimism. A lot of work has been done over the years to improve the place a step at a time, all the while running its program of courses. These were largely organised through the Centre's association with the Arvon Foundation, though it was also being used for self-organised events in the months, autumn to spring, after that main program had finished.

More recently, the focus has moved from the two main buildings, where the courses have been run in the big dining room and the library. Now, wonders are being wrought in the extensive – but hitherto largely ignored – garden area that overlooks the glen. With the help of volunteers and the Beechgrove Gardening team, the land has been shaped into garden beds and a pond and paths. Volunteers have worked with mason George Gunn to make a drystone-walled storytelling circle, with a fire-pit in the centre and open to the surrounding hillsides. And Steve



Croft House

ve with Moniack Mhor

oorway by Ruth Tauber. Other photos by Nancy MacDonald.

James has created an extraordinary building in the midst of the garden: straw bale walls with lime render; a reciprocal-frame roof built of round timber, capped with living heather; clay internal walls; oak door and floor, a woodstove . . . The building is full of delights. Apart from the lovely shape and the light and the warmth (a precious commodity when the winds blow in from the West (or the North or the North East), there is delight in the use of materials – so many different materials, each requiring its own skill-set. And there is a sense of security in its shape (an ellipse) and in that varied mix of down-to-earth materials. There is a feeling of good solid work, of competence in every detail. The Centre's website, **www.moniackmhor.org.uk** has information about these and more.

But, wonderful as they are, this heather-roofed building and the transformation of the garden area are not the entire focus of energies at Moniack Mhor. It is a centre for writers, and that is where the impetus is aimed. The physical changes are indicative of the plans which are finally maturing.

From the end of this season, Moniack's long association with the Arvon Foundation is ending. From 2015 onwards, Moniack Mhor will be fully autonomous – planning their own courses and finding new ways to use the space. The regular courses will be there, of course, on poetry, the novel or writing the short story. But the directors are also looking for new ideas, ways to present and teach writing or to develop skills in areas that are relatively new – blogging, writing for the Web, using social media – or that don't exist yet, except in the minds of writers. The world is changing fast, and writers need to keep up. . .

Except for those who don't, of course. There is a timelessness about poetry, for instance, that allows us to hear the voice of Li Po or Sappho or Ossian, from a distance of centuries. There are fertile areas here too, for new ways to infect writers with the passion for words, to develop the facility for precision, for truth, for the phrase that will make the heart turn over in the chest. Apart from the traditionally structured course, with Moniack becoming autonomous, there is a chance to look at other possibilities – shorter courses – or longer; or combined interests, such as hill-walking and poetry. There already exists a tradition of fine writing and climbing - sometimes it seems that the hills are as full of writers as climbers. Perhaps thoughtful articulate people are drawn to climbing – or perhaps the extremes of landscape and weather and experience nurture the thoughtful mind. As well as hills worth climbing, there are beaches worth walking, there are trees as tall as any in Britain - there is a landscape waiting for writers to witness. ■

Ketea

Short Story by Shane Strachan

Out on the edge of town, Derek finished sorting through a pile of old boat machinery in his dad's scrap yard. The weather was fine for it being the middle of September so he kept on working even though hours had passed since cars had streamed along the road nearby, heading to homes outside of the Broch. Under a makeshift canopy where the scraps of iron were stored, he switched on the radio for the first time that week. The news was on. He listened as he sat on the dusty earth and untangled a pile of copper wire, his large hands turning black with oil – there had been a bad car crash the night before on the A90… a local councillor had resigned after some scandal… a whale was trapped in Fraserburgh harbour – the radio suddenly cut off. He went over to it and tried fichering with the on/off switch, but the batteries had run out. In the shadow of the canopy, he felt a chill slide across his bare arms and the short strawberry-blonde hairs across them stood on end. Beyond the walls of the scrap yard, the hay bales in the fields nearby cast long shadows across the harvested land – it was time to start heading home.

Weak with tiredness and hunger, he began the half-hour walk through town. He passed by the secondary school he'd left at the start of summer and wondered if this would be the last time he'd set eyes on the building – it looked like an old factory, its clock tower stretching out over the corrugated metal roof. Then he cut through the street he used to live on, making sure not to catch the eye of any of his old neighbours that were out and about. Before long, he was crossing the links towards the caravan site at the end of the beach esplanade. They'd bid here since his dad was declared bankrupt three months before.

Just as he gripped the caravan's plastic door handle, he heard his dad's girlfriend Yulia shrieking in Russian. The whole unit started rocking. He checked his pockets and counted the money he had on him – four pound sixty. Maybe enough to buy a wee plate of chips and a drink from the Ship Inn.

He walked back out the caravan site and headed through the reeking fish factories towards the Faithlie Basin. A few of the boats moored here were sore needing a lick of paint. The worst was a nameless ship from one of the trawler companies on the West Coast – blue paint clung to the bow and the stern, but most of the hull between had been stripped away to orange rust by the sea. The paint on another from Banff had begun to flake off across the stern below the net-wrapped winch. The local boats faired slightly better and you could still make out their names in the evening light: *Harvest Quest, Adriana, Christian Watt, Fairweather* and *Guide Us*. The *Harvest Quest* was in the shade of a massive trawler anchored in the Balaclava Basin behind, the *Pontus*, a freshly-painted red ship. Some of her crew stood out on deck: all three of the Jockel loons, stocky, dark-haired brothers in their thirties – the eldest James, the youngest Jamie, and the middle brother, John. When Derek was younger, his dad had worked out at sea on the Jockels' boats, but then Jimmy Jockel had died a couple of year's back and his three sons soon got shot of Derek's dad.

The brothers lounged just outside the wheelhouse, smoking fags and drinking bottles of beer. James pointed down below and said something that made his brothers fall into fits of laughter. Derek looked to where he'd pointed – a strip of people lined the edge of the pier on the other side of the basin. The whale must still be trapped, he realised.

He rushed past the pubs and supply stores to where all the folk stood. At the edge of the crowd, he asked an auler wifie what had been happening. Folk had told her that it was a young minke whale in the harbour – it had been trapped there for nearly a day. The night before, a small fishing boat had tried to herd the whale back out to sea to its waiting mother, but the creature had sunk out of sight only to pop back up behind the trawler, further in than before. And earlier on the day, some experts had travelled up to the Broch and organised a flotilla of three boats to try herd it out, but instead of being coaxed up the breakwater, the whale had swum towards the boats and squeezed in between two of the vessels, causing the whole operation to come to a standstill. They were going to try again the morn, but for now folk were coming down to try and catch a glimpse of the peer beast.

Up it came, its slate-grey skin breaking through a film of rainbowed oil on the surface of the water. A faint jet sprayed from the blowhole. Its small fin then keeked out as it curved downwards, heading back below the surface. One bairn screamed out loud that it looked like a shark, and another clapped her hands as though she was at a show. Their parents were quick to wheesht them.

Derek's belly began rumbling. He said bye to the wifie and headed back the way to the Ship Inn. Inside, he decided against ordering a drink – he needed to hold on to as much of his money as he could – so he asked for a pint of water to go with his plate of chips. When he got both, he sat down in a quiet corner by the window and looked out at the harbour – a wee red boat was making its way into the Faithlie Basin.

He soon found himself lugging in to a conversation between the old barmaid and a fisherman sat at the bar. The barmaid was explaining that Jamie Jockel had been in the night before raving about how the young whale had followed the *Pontus* into the harbour, and how the crew had watched it breach out of the spume in the ship's wake. Jamie had smirtled at the fact he was the reason half the town had been down the harbour since then to gowk at the thing. One of the regulars at the end of the bar had cut Jamie's spiel short, saying that surely he could see it was a damned shame for the creature. Jamie had laughed in return and argued that, back in the aul days when whaling was the done thing round the coast at Peterheid, his ancestors would've been happy enough to harpoon the beast so why should anybody be greeting and girning now? Folk had gone quiet at that and had left him to yabber on about the fish he'd caught on his last trip and the muckle boxes he'd sold at the market.

Derek's plate and pint glass were empty. He ambled out the Ship and made his way back along the pier, through the factories and round to the caravan. When he got in – the bead curtain rattling against the door – he could hear his dad snoring in the double bedroom. He crept ben to his room and sat on the single bed. Through the scuffed plastic window, he watched the waves crash on the black rocks at the foot of the caravan site.

Once it was dark, he switched on the small light above his bed. He began counting out the change he had left in his pockets along with some coins he'd hidden across the wooden slats beneath his mattress. There was six pound and sixty-three pence altogether – he only needed a wee bit more. He'd have to try and not spend anything tomorrow.

He hid all the money away again and lay down on his bed. It was the coldest night there had been in a while and he had to pull both thin bed sheets up over himself. He tugged the string cord above his head and the light went out.

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The next day, Derek checked the timetable outside the bus station on his way to the scrap yard. A bus left from the station every half hour on a Saturday throughout the day. He'd have to plan it so that he wasn't caught standing around waiting for one.

He was left to his own devices on the yard that Thursday morning and took his time going through the metal that still needed sorting – as soon as they had enough of any one metal, his dad would fill up his car boot with it and take it through to the proper scrappers in Aberdeen for cash in hand and that would mean they had to start replenishing stock. In the past, they'd gotten most of it by stripping it out of old abandoned factories and the black shells of burned-down houses.

To drag out the sorting further, Derek read a chapter at a time from a library book in between sifting through the remaining piles of metal – a battered hardback copy of a Stevenson novel.

His dad arrived in the afternoon. Derek could hear the wheels of the ancient car plowing through the chuckies at the front of the yard as he hid the book away under his jacket out of sight of his dad. Yulia refused to get out the car and sat playing on her phone with her window down.

I've got somebody coming wie some scrap soon, his dad said as he leant his bulk against the canopy, his hands stuffed into his jean pockets. Thought I'd better deal wie him so you dinna hae us swicked again by some chancer, he sniggered. He must have been drinking – it was the only time he laughed.

A small green car made its way up to the yard and halted a few metres away from them. The driver was an aul mannie who peered out over the wheel like a tortoise deciding whether or not to come out of its shell. His dad rushed over and opened the car door to help the man out. They shook hands and then both ambled round to look inside the boot. As soon as it opened, Derek's dad shook his head at the sight of what was in there. After a few minutes discussion, he shouted Derek over to help unload the man's car. There were a few steel bars and other parts of old gym equipment that they had to carry together into the yard.

When the green car drove off, Derek asked his dad how much he'd had to pay the man for it.

Nae nithing. I just telt him it wisna worth the petrol it would cost to drive it somewye else, he smiled. Right I better awa. Here… he rummaged through his shirt pocket and pulled out a fiver. Get yersel summin fae the chippers for supper. Oh – ye sure ye'r nae wanting to come wie ma to the fitbaa on Saturday?

Derek shook his head. He took the fiver from his dad and thanked him, then went back to sorting the scrap. His dad and Yulia drove off.

On his way back home from the yard that evening, Derek nipped into the bakers before it shut. Whatever pies they still had sitting out were always buy one get one free at the end of the day. Along with a small bottle of cola, he bought two Scotch bradies and ate them both on his way down to the harbour.

At the Faithlie Basin, a blue van drove past and stopped just a few yards up from Derek. Two men got out, both wearing jackets with a circular logo that read CETACEAN RESEARCH AND RESCUE UNIT. In the centre of the logo there was a picture of a whirlpool filled with dolphins and whales. The men shook hands with the skipper of the *Adriana* before he helped them get on board – one at a time, they crossed the gap between the quayside's solid concrete and the bars along on the edge of the boat's deck that heaved up and down with the bobbing of the tide. Derek decided to head to the Balaclava Basin to see what would unfold.

Tonight, the crowd had grown to a teeming bourach that had wedged itself around the whole pier to see the whale. There was a TV crew setting up cameras nearby and photographers elbowed through folk to get to the edge of the pier. Somebody asked the TV reporter what was happening. Derek listened as she explained that there was to be one last attempt to coax the whale back out to sea before it became too dark.

And fit'll happen if it disna work? a voice from the crowd asked. The reporter shrugged her shoulders and turned away to speak to her colleagues.

There was soon speak of the Jockel loons being asked to move the *Pontus* round the basin to make room for the smaller boats to manoeuvre. They'd been quick to refuse, saying it wasn't worth wasting fuel on. Derek looked over at the *Pontus* and watched as Jamie Jockel flicked a tabbie down into the harbour below him.

Folk started clapping and cheering as a fleet of small trawlers made its way round from the Faithlie Basin to the Balaclava. In their shades of sky blue, *Harvest Quest* and *Guide Us* trailed behind *Adriana*'s forest green. A silence fell over the crowd when the blue trawlers came to a halt and *Adriana* turned in the harbour, moving far enough to one side to let the others follow suite. Once all three vessels were turned and ready to head

back out the basin, they sat still, waiting to see where the whale would re-emerge.

Breaking the hush, someone started shouting at the rear of the crowd.

Get oot ma road for ony sake! I've got nae time for this cairry on. It was James Jockel heading back from town with John. The pair of them barged through the crowd, bottles clinking in their carrier bags. The younger folk were quick to move out of their way, but the brothers soon came up against a row of three auld mannies, the same three you'd usually see sitting on a bench outside the Fishermen's Mission on mild summer evenings.

All three took their time turning to face the Jockels before looking the brothers up and down.

Fa do we hae here the nicht? said the one in the middle.

Fa is't noo? asked another, his walking stick held up across him like a barrier. A quine near Derek nudged her yapping friends and pointed over to the men. Everyone else nearby had fallen silent to listen in.

Weel, fae the look o these pair, I would say they'd be twa o Jimmy Jockel's flock, said the tallest of the three men. He seemed to have developed a crook in his neck from always peering down.

The brothers looked at one another and smirked.

Aye, you'd be richt enough there, said the first man, whose anorak fluttered in a breeze that was starting to pick up. I wonder fit Jimmy would think if he was here the day and could see fit had become o his lot.

Oor Da would've been prood o us, James said.

Huh! said the man with the walking stick. Your faither was a fine cheil fa worked hard for fit you've noo got. He pointed his stick up at the sky. Mind that he'll be up there looking doon on ye, so think on him.

John mumbled something under his breath and James laughed. They cut round the row of men and barged through the rest of the crowd towards their ship.

Everybody's attention was soon drawn back to the basin where the whale had emerged. Derek watched as its blowhole sprayed once more. It didn't disappear back underwater this time, but, instead, circled in front of the boats as though unsure of where to swim. There was a collective thrum from the engines of the trawlers and they began to steadily move forwards, side-by-side. In response, the whale soon straightened up its course and headed onwards up the pier.

Alongside the trawlers, the crowd migrated up the quayside. A couple of policewomen commanded everybody to move back from the edge of the pier as folk packed closer and closer to one another to catch a glimpse of the whale's movements.

At the junction where the entrance to each basin joined onto the wider pier, another trawler from the Faithlie slipped in alongside the convoy to fill the gap that opened up. The skippers signalled with their hands to the wheelhouses nearest them and communicated through their radios until they were all safely aligned. Soon they began moving forward as a four.

When the whale breached a few metres in front of the *Adriana*, all four of the boats slowed down, their engines humming ever so slightly less. Some bairns sprinted ahead to the very end of the pier and clambered onto the concrete blocks of the breakwater that ran up to the small lighthouse at the harbour's entrance. The trawlers gradually slowed there and their engines quietened. Coming to a complete standstill, they plugged the entrance to the harbour shut.

One of the experts from the Cetacean Unit came out onto the deck of the *Adriana* and gave the thumbs up. Derek joined in with everyone in cheering loud enough for the boats' crews to hear in the distance.

Folk were quick to get on the phone with the news. Newspaper reporters interviewed locals and scribbled notes in shorthand, while the TV crew speired for someone that could speak good English and not slip into their native tongue. A local minister pushed past Derek and volunteered himself. He told the TV reporter he'd been praying for the whale to be safely returned to its mother and was grateful that he'd be able to celebrate the news in the morning with his congregation.

He rushed past the pubs and supply stores to where all the folk stood. At the edge of the crowd, he asked an auler wifie what had been happening. Folk had told her that it was a young minke whale in the harbour – it had been trapped there for nearly a day. The night before, a small fishing boat had tried to herd the whale back out to sea to its waiting mother, but the creature had sunk out of sight only to pop back up behind the trawler, further in than before.

Folk started heading home and Derek decided to do the same. On his walk back to the caravan, a dark cloud crept over the evening sun, casting the town in darkness.

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Two days later, Derek woke up on the Saturday morning with a groggy head. For the second night in a row, he'd been kept awake most of the night by a storm and had sat up at points to watch the thunder flash out at sea. He struggled up out of bed and pulled the curtains away from his window. The sun was blazing outside – if it wasn't for the streaks of seawater dried onto the windowpane, he might have thought he'd dreamt the storm of the night before.

Coorse nicht again, eh? his dad said. He was sitting on the couch listening to the radio and, his football top already on in preparation for going to watch the game at the Bellslea.

Derek hummed in agreement. He went about his usual Saturday routine – a couple of slices of toast, a quick shower and then out the door for a walk as soon as he got dressed.

The beach was already hoaching – bairns ran wild at the swing park and a few families were already down on the bay, setting up their windbreakers and laying out picnics.

Derek took off his shoes and cut through the marram grass along the dunes, down onto the bay.

Further along, there were a couple of large groups standing in separate circles, facing inwards. They looked like some sort of club. He guessed they must have been here to surf since there were four surfers nearby, paddling out towards the proper waves on their boards.

Out at sea, the *Pontus* headed southeast in the blur of the heat, and at the edge of the coast, it was possible to make out the wrecked *Freyja*, still trapped on the rocky shore at Cairnbulg.

A teenage loon rose up above the rest of the group nearest Derek by climbing up on top of something bulky. Derek realised what it was: a dark-grey mound with a white underside covered in thin sagging grooves – a minke whale. The flesh across its head had started to turn pale and was flecked with orange, and its lower jaw was tinged with blood. Derek's stomach turned as the stench of rotting flesh blew at him – the whale must have washed up two nights before to have decayed this much.

The loon on top of the carcass posed as some of the group took pictures of him, all unfazed by the smell and the swarms of flies circling around them. A couple of the others joined the boy by clambering up the side of the dead beast, using the grooves in its belly as a sort of ladder. The other group further up the beach were doing the same, helping each other to mount a much larger whale – the mother. The realisation that neither whale had made it left Derek feeling a fool for cheering with the crowd just two nights before.

He turned and started walking back. He'd usually go as far as the Waters of Philorth halfway along the bay, but he didn't want to have to pass the dead whales again. When his dad ran over a seagull in town or flattened a pheasant out on the road by the scrap yard, Derek would do anything to avoid crossing paths with the death for a few days after.

His dad was gone when he got back. He'd left a copy of the Fraserburgh Herald lying on the couch. Derek picked it up and read what time the football match kicked off – at noon, just ten minutes away. He rushed into his room and yanked the mattress up to get all the coins out from underneath. Once his pockets were stuffed with them, he filled a couple of plastic bags with all the clothes, shoes and possessions he had.

Underneath the bed, he came across the library book he'd been reading: *Weir of Hermiston* – he hadn't finished it yet, but he wasn't too fussed since Stevenson hadn't either. He plucked out the receipt he'd been using for a bookmark and wrote a note on the back of it:

Please return this.
Dinna try and find me –
I'll be fine.
Derek

He left the book and the note on his bed and then rushed out of the caravan with his two bags, not bothering to lock the door.

The bus driver gave him a queer look when he passed her the pile of change, but she was friendly enough when he showed her the address of the student accommodation in Aberdeen and asked if she could let him know when to get off.

Nae problem ma loon, she smiled.

The bus was quiet – only a couple of older people sat up front, and a young quine near the back. He chose a pair of seats midway and lay awkwardly across the two, out of sight of the window. The bus started on its journey. He could tell which streets they were headed along from the motion: Charlotte, King Edward, Strichen, Boothby… When the bus slowed to tackle the roundabout on the edge of town, he knew he was on his way. ■

The Story of You

Short Story by Karen Bek-Pedersen

All of these years I have thought about it every single day and yet I have never told you the story. I have never said what it really was that happened that day – because I am scared to speak about it; I never spoke to you. And this seems so weird and so wrong. I cannot say for sure what makes me write to you tonight. Perhaps I sense your presence – it happened at this time of year, on an evening just like tonight, soft and pungent with summer rain.

Do you understand what these words mean? I may say things you don't understand, but I am not at all sure of how to speak to you, or reach you. It was a night like tonight – wet, I had cycled home, got drenched. But I was not cold. I don't remember being cold. I remember a dreadful void. Lying on the bed for hours with tears filling my veins like transparent blood. Endless drops and drops of rain while I stood alone by the bedroom window long into the night.

Ten years ago. I wish you could remember it. – No, that isn't true. I would not want you to recall that night, but I do wish you could remember – and that you were here, with me. I wish that even now. There never was another.

A strange thing now to realize that I have no way of addressing you. This old pen in my hand and my name carefully engraved on it. How I would like to have given you a pen like that, watched you write your name with it. With each of these sentences I find myself wanting to call you by your name and make it clear that I am writing this to you and no one else – but I don't know your name. I feel so ashamed at that. There never was a name. I didn't know whether you were a boy or a girl. How then could I name you? – Can you forgive me for that?

Sometimes I dream about you. Sometimes I think I hear your voice. Sometimes I even turn to look. In my mind I have images of you – the feeling of your tiny hands, your body asleep against my chest, the warmth of your little brow when I kiss you. Dreams that went by undreamt. – Do you remember being?

I had not anticipated you. We had not planned, your father and I, but that did not matter – it didn't matter a whit once you turned up. You were there and in that same instant it was the most obvious thing of all. It was meant to be that way. You were meant to be there. To be. How could I not love you? The mere realization of what I was capable of doing – make another person come out of my body. A conundrum of overwhelming proportions.

I remember that day, the day I became aware of you. I was standing in the bathroom about to wash my hands, there was a pale blue towel hanging on the railing and the window was ajar with the smell of freshly cut grass wafting by, and then I looked into the mirror. Into it. That was the day I wasn't bleeding when I should have been and yet I felt as if something was sitting there, waiting. Snuggling up and waiting. Then, gradually, it twigged – and it hit me like a revelation. You were there. Like some half reflected shadow in the mirror. Already almost there. That surge of pride. Of headless euphoria – panic and dizziness and silent exhilarated shouts in the bathroom as I stood there by the basin forgetting to wash my hands. I simply stared at the water running and running from the tap – and I knew.

I stopped. Everything stopped. Nothing was the same anymore. I was not me any longer – I was us. I was you and me. Do you remember me? From that moment all I wanted was to hold you. I had never thought of you before and suddenly I could think of nothing else – no one else. Just you.

You should have seen your father when I told him. I said three magic words to him and made it all real. When I said those words out loud it became reality – not just some figment of imagination. You were truly there. Your father jumped up from his chair, ruler and pencil still in hand and the draftsman's drawings spread out on the desk in front of him. It was a Saturday. I don't know why I recall that. He looked at me as if he'd never seen me before, as if I had appeared as unexpectedly as you had and he wanted to fill his eyes to the brim with that moment. I'm not sure what it was he said. I think he said something. Or maybe he didn't – maybe that's what I remember, that for once I had managed to render him speechless. I wonder now what he felt at that moment, what he felt for you.

I wanted to tell you good things, happy stories. But there are no other stories. This is the story of you, the only one there is, and I never told it to you before. Can you bear to hear it?

The next morning I was sick. I have never been so sick and so thrilled and it was horrible and exulting. Went on for days, weeks – nine weeks to be precise.

There was a day of reversal – everything turned around, as if entry had become exit right at the point of crossing the threshold, and me discovering a little too late that the door I had thought was opening was in fact closing. I wonder why it happened. It just happened and nobody seemed able to tell me why. I was supposed to meet someone outside the museum and it was raining and she didn't come and the museum was closed because it was a Monday. After I'd been standing there long enough to get soaked I cycled home again – through the park, by the church and the theatre and then along the street – a gentle ten minute bike ride. I didn't strain myself. I swear to you I didn't. I want you to know that for sure. It wasn't that bike ride. I don't think it was. I had cycled the day before, too. I got off my bike, took it through the close and locked it in the shed – all the time wanting to lie down because I was feeling nauseous. The rain had made me wet, I was drenched and grumpy for having been stood up, needed to get into some dry clothes and I headed straight for the bathroom.

There was blood in my shoes. I think I stopped breathing then. For a full second I stared into blank space, convincing myself that I had not seen what I had seen. One second. Then I could feel it, the blood as it churned and seethed on its way out of me. I should not have been bleeding. It had run all the way down the inside of my legs without me really noticing. It had already happened. My stockings, my skirt – blood everywhere and it was sticky and warm and wet like the muggy rain outside. And I had to get it all off. I had to. Couldn't stand feeling it against my skin. I wanted out, out of it. Then your father came running. Eyes stiff and fearful. I had probably made some noise, said something, cried. I don't know. I was squatting on the bathroom floor when he came in, and there was blood. Deep-curdling lightheaded blood. And tears, I think there were tears. Somewhere in that mess was you and that thought alone was unbearable. I looked for you. I looked everywhere – stockings, shoes. I saw that my hands were shaking. I had to look. Mysterious noises surrounded me and I couldn't place them. Eerie, non-human noises, I had no idea what they were till I figured out they were connected to the strange trembling of my throat. I had my hands in all of it. You were somewhere. I knew that I would recognize you on sight – was totally convinced of that. You'd be tinier than tiny, but you'd be there.

Did it hurt? I think about that now. It is raining outside tonight, a gentle, soothing rain. Drenching. I'm so sorry for what I did to you.

I remember sitting utterly empty under the shower and your father was washing me and I was not able to look at him. There was so little of me left. I just sat with the warm water brushing over me until all the tears had dissolved and the blood turned pale and transparent and it was over and I was so tired I could have slept with my eyes open. Something had snapped inside of me. Your father was on his knees next to me, showerhead in hand, and the sound of that water running and running and running until I finally realized that he thought I was about to die.

I think I had forgotten about being alive. I watched myself put a very wet hand on his shoulder and clutch it – for all the words that were nowhere to be found.

Later on I was told that you would have been about the size of a kidney bean. My dearest one, I may not even have laid eyes one you. My eyes filled with a gaping void although I searched and searched. You were there somewhere. Lumps of blood and gore and stuff. Darkly purple colours. Blackened reds and streaks and streaks, all over my hands. I never found you. I am sorry. I looked. I really did look everywhere and everywhere. Somehow it slipped. Everything just slipped. And broke. Only he was there. Only your father. I couldn't endure the sensation of him touching me, looking at me, seeing all of that. He didn't say anything, not that evening, not ever. But he has not forgotten. There are times when I see it in him, the thought of you in his eyes. He weeps the way boys do, no noise, no tears. I could not mention you. At times I tried – tying my throat in silent knots.

Days went by before I could bear the touch of his hand without it cutting to the quick, before I could be just warm and calm and could close my eyes without that uncouth unravelling sensation. Without scarlet heavily dripping from the inside of my eyelids. I never knew it was possible to switch off a summer just like that; I have no recollection of what the weather did, how I spent my time, what occupied my hands. In my mind all I see is me, standing by the bedroom window, watching the rain, watching the night, listening to the darkness and the sound of shattering stars. Me there on that threshold, going nowhere. No exit. No entry. I remember details in close-up. I was nowhere. Summer had disappeared. The only one left alive was your father.

He did all sorts of things for me – to keep me snug, then trying to make me smile. He did practical tasks to alleviate things for me. One afternoon I realized that he had shaved only half of his face – it looked ridiculous and I smiled. He said he'd gone about all day like that and I hadn't noticed – and I had to smile. Your father.

There never was another – no matter what we did. And it hurt. It hurt in a way that I could not express. It didn't go away when I was asleep. It did not go away.

Ten years on – and me sitting here. Should I not have put you behind me by now? I probably should; I just can't. So here I am, writing all of this horror to you and I hate it. I hate doing this, writing these words, because I wanted to tell you good things, happy stories. But there are no other stories. This is the story of you, the only one there is, and I never told it to you before. Can you bear to hear it? I never spoke to you, nor sang for you. I never kissed you. Everything I should have done – all is thin air. Moments that never were.

Not a story for children. You would have been a child by now. You maybe would have understood. I don't know what came over me tonight. Maybe just the rain – drenching summer rain. The scent of wetness and grass and evening from the open garden door – bringing memories, bringing you to make my eyes spill onto the paper and leave blots in the ink from my pen. This is how I know you. It's all I know about you. I never found out just who you were. You slipped away, slipped in the crimson clotted flood. All I wanted was for you to be. Do you remember? There must have been at least that mesmerizing noise from a pulsating universe. Did you know it was a heart? ■

Poetry

Là blàth aig an fhaing
Dàibhidh Eyre

Cha do chuidich mise a-riamh sibh
nuair a bha sibh a' togail a' chruidh.
Agus cha robh mi a-riamh thall aig an fhaing,
air làithean blàth a' chliopaidh.

Ach tha mi air feòil ithe,
cus dhith, is cinnteach,
agus bidh seacaid chlòimhe orm
nuair a bhios mi a' feuchainn ri bhith spaideil.

Agus bidh mi a' smaoineachadh gu tric
air na beathaichean a bhàsaich gus sin a thoirt dhomh
agus oirbhse - cùramach, faiceallach -
a bha a' coimhead às an dèidh

an ceangal sin eadarainn.
Tha e follaiseach, gu ìre sin, nach eil?
An talamh is an tuathanach
an tarbhan is an truinnsear.

Ach tha mi a' sgrìobhadh seo le peann
(Bic, meadhanach, gorm)
agus a' feuchainn ri smaoineachadh
air an uiread de dhaoine a bha an sàs ann, -

a fhuair an ola,
a chruthaich am plastaig, an inc,
a bha san fhactaraidh, sa bhàta, san làraidh,
a bha sa bhùth -

na mìltean de dhaoine sin
a chuidich mi gus faclan a thoirt
bho inntinn, gu làmh, gu pàipear.
A' smaoineachadh oirbh uile.

Sinn uile aig an fhaing san t-samhradh
a' cabadaich ri chèile
a' gabhail cupan teatha
a' moladh an là.

Leòmhann
Marcas Mac an Tuairneir

Ath-dhealbhte mar leòmhann.
Allaidh;
Sgrios mi do sheiche,
Le mo chròg an is mo spògan
Is laigh thu air làr na cidsin
Lag is deòrail.

An Island Spring
Ingrid Leonard

1.
Northern air is blue; it gets wrung
through clouds, spun by wind
and releases itself through ill-prepared
nostrils, down the flue of a lung.

Sometimes it doesn't make it. Howling
gales drive breath past the mouths
of startled Orcadians, lips dry-closing
on a void, heads jerking sharply for
gulpfuls of freshness, the whiff of life
then a draught of ice water to the gullet;
to breathe is to come home.

2.
The sky sprawls, acid blue and thins at the top
'til outer space feels close (place your
bets now): who will be the first to see the stars
on a bright, sunny morning? It's 17 degrees,
daylight hurts the eyes.

Later, in a floodlit moonscape,
its child, gathering towards half-full,
comes close to the earth, her shadows
scant. Clouds are scraps of threadbare
cloth in a different shade of deep,
the stars are faded speckles. Earth
is a scape and daylight has forgot itself,
planets and the dog star shine.
I put on coat and boots, the gate grates
and I step from shadow into a lunar field, land
is a bounced reflection. I reach up to scoop
handfuls from the sky – soft, cool and crumbling,
dust of the moon. I press my face to my palms
and feel protected, perhaps for a spell,
from time's wheel, a 5-minute reward
for a poor, human offering.

3.
Day returns as a gale blows out,
the wind-burnt grass is pale. But the sky
brightens, a dream of warm weather,
where the barley-grass seethes in its silken
dance, where all is brilliant lime, straw-yellow,
blue. Put on your shades, folk, soon the summer
witch will be wearing her best ribbon,
a watery strip of pink raw silk.

Auld Luv Sighting
Mary McDougall

This wee hairt's
hud a fer wee dunt
the day!

It was a man, a boddy,
that it didnae furst ken,
but it dunted onyway,
And then it said:
"But ah dae mind ane
and his hair that grey!"

And then I thocht – ma conscious being –
"Mebbe he disnae ken me eether!"

And so ah went aboot ma business
and tried nae tae think aboot ma hairt,
which was duntin awa,

And I was kind and explicit tae the wumin
at the coonter aboot hur buik order,
but aw the time ah was thinking:

"Ah dae mind him but does he ken me?
Are baith oor hairts duntin?"

In the end, ah didnae say awthing.
ah jist went oan wi ma work.

The order was yon buik by Proust.

Poetry

winter shore
Pauline Prior-Pitt

as far as eyes can reach
smooth swept sand
ruckled by kelp skeins
on fire in a low down sun

waves caught in its spotlight
sparkle a jitterbug

where pebbles tackle each other
in glittering foam

and a cloud
shaped like a giant ichthyosaurus
slowly insinuates itself between the sun and me

Love Story
James Andrew

When they said they loved each other
they felt they could walk on water.
So they did.
Hand in hand,
they sauntered across the lake,
admiring the mountains
and sky.

The boatman,
who was ferrying tourists,
hoped it wouldn't catch on.

A cormorant,
bobbing around,
squawked
and thrashed the water with frantic wings,
laboured into flight.

The lovers felt so good
they thought they could fly.
So they did.
On extended arms,
they glided past the cormorant,
who blinked
and beat his wings harder,
looking paranoid.

The lovers
settled on the water,
then lounged back to shore.
The concrete walkway
slid open beneath them.
They fell,
crashing limbs about in soil,
drowned
in the practicality of earth.

Oscar Buzz
Jared Carnie

Walking with you
Isn't like a romantic comedy.

Other people don't blend into the background.
Some of them distract us.
Some of them scare us.

Little disagreements
Don't lead to passionate kisses.
Some of them fester for days.

Shop windows don't remind us
Of stuff that happened
When we were kids.

We don't look good in the rain.
When we get in, we're freezing.
The last thing on our mind is sex.
We want hot water bottles
And cups of tea.
Besides, one of us still has to let the dog out
For a piss.

We listen to the same songs over and over.
Nobody gets bored.
Nobody gets royalties.

Neither of us had to learn any lessons.
There weren't any misunderstandings.
We didn't see each other
Walking with someone attractive
Who turned out to be a relative.
We didn't misconstrue
Something we overheard on the phone.

We met and then we met again
And things kept happening
And we'd make each other laugh
And neither of us
Had to turn up at midnight
To save the situation
It just happened a couple of times
After late shifts
When we really needed the company.

Luckiest Man In The World
Jared Carnie

Rain on the window
Leonard Cohen on the speakers
Her asleep on the pillow next to me

Where her mother took her
Sally Evans

The strangest place her mother took her yet.
Water sloshes through the boggy sky.
It has a power of glamour but it's wet.

From their last quarters which they'll soon forget
they hired a van to bring their luggage dry
to the strangest place her mother took her yet.

Rootless again, they sought new roots to set
in this unlikely tower, the moss nearby
that has a power of glamour but is wet.

Unrepaired roofs above the parapet,
it has a beauty that's about to die,
the strangest place her mother took her yet

and in the gloomy orchard medlars blet,
and through the marshes deer approach and pry,
it has a power of glamour but it's wet.

In this extreme, squelchy, remote, she'll fret,
and soon she'll quit, like a rare butterfly
the strangest place her mother took her yet
that has a power of glamour, but is wet.

Inuksuk agus Innunguaq
Iain Urchardan

Sheas *Inuksuk,*
mar fhianais dhuinne,
cho cruaidh ri creag
san fhuachd ghuineach.

Cairt-iùil cloiche
a' comharrachadh càite;
toiseach slighe,
a' sònrachadh àite:

àite seilg,
àite iasgaich,
àite còmhnaidh,
àite biadhaidh,

àite adhraidh,
àite seòlaidh;
is taigh-spadaidh
charibou feòla.

Càrn nan daoine:
Inupiat is *Inuit*,
Crìoch-àit' tro ùine
Yupik is *Kalaallit*.

Sheas *innunguaq*
"an coltas duine"
cho cruaidh ri creag
san fhuachd ghuineach ...

(Fiosrachadh: Peter Irnik,
Gnìomhaiche Cultarail nan Inuit)

The Stillman
by Tom McCulloch
Sandstone Press
Review by Alison Napier

Many books have made me shiver over the years, some with terror at a shocking denouement, others with delight at an unexpected thrill, and a few because I was sitting in a draught. This book made me shiver with cold, for no one does the Full Scottish Winter better than Tom McCulloch.

Jim Drever is the Stillman, the distillery worker who looks after the nine copper-pot stills and creates the perfect whisky in his 'meditation of machinery'. A middle-aged man marooned in the Highlands who drinks and smokes too much, he is bored with his life and his wife and baffled and alarmed by his children. His son is at the complex, morose-teen and constantly iPoded stage and the other is a soon-to-be-married-to-a-dork, fashion-conscious, more than a little ditsy, daughter. Jim is a Scottish male in a masculinity crisis.

Relations, both industrial and personal, are also chilly with his workmates. A strike looms amidst flurries of ballot-papers and unsubtle canvassing, and our still man remains a man apart, his mind elsewhere, his life increasingly enmeshed in lies and deceits as he plods through drifts and watches his breath freeze in the bitter still night.

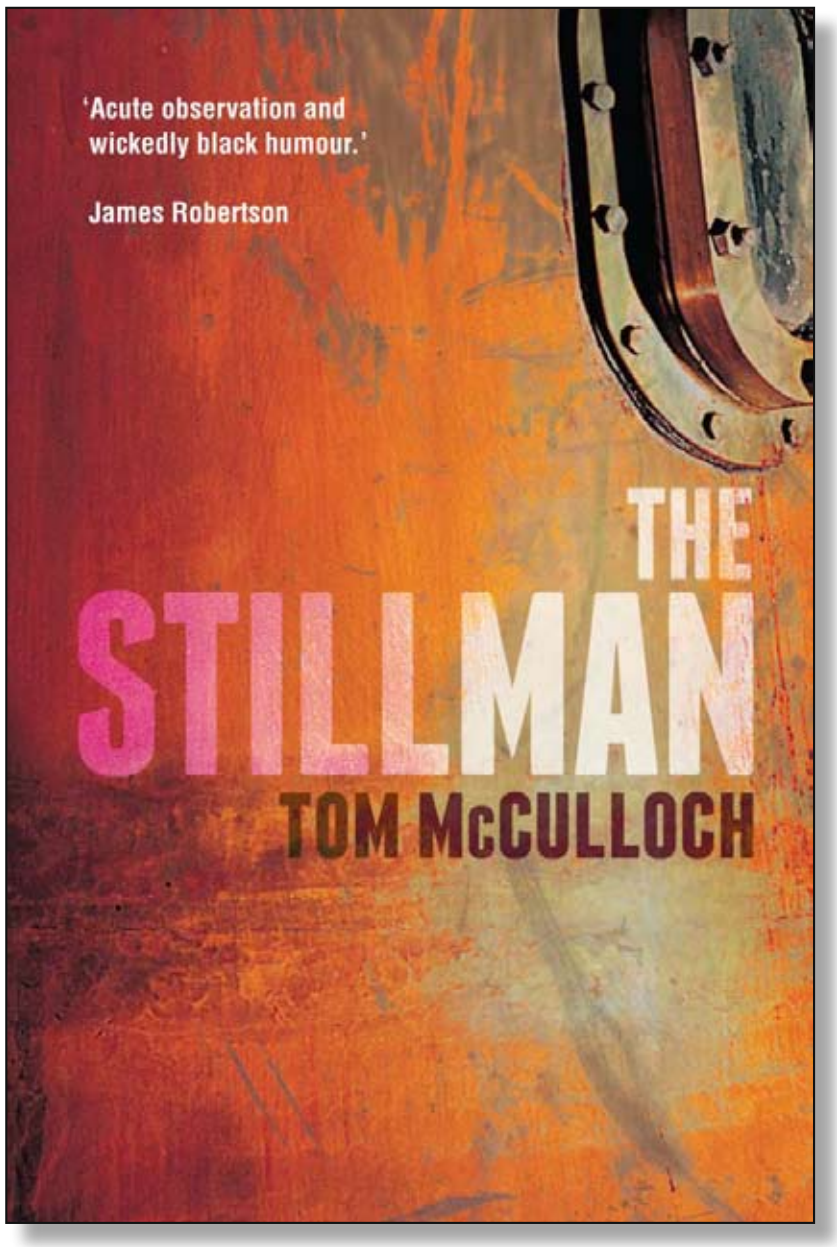
And suddenly we are in Cuba! Ridiculous temperatures, useless air-conditioning, multiple Mojitos, rusty Ladas and 1950s Pontiacs, crumbling grandeur, seedy bars and reggae, lush vegetation and bottles of Havana Club. Tom McCulloch does stifling shimmering Cuban heat as well as he does the Scottish chill. The descriptions of this beautiful country forced into self-reliance and literal self-preservation sing like the Buena Vista Social Club, full of old men with their cigars, memories and dreams, and the young racing ahead on their mopeds, bouncing along pot-holed highways, open shirts flapping, eyes screwed up against the sun with the past forgotten.

The Stillman is a highly accomplished novel of intense contrasts; heat and ice, the monochrome, snowbound roads untreated by Bear and dusty technicolour Caribbean dirt tracks, the living and the dead. The heart of Jim the Still Man is a barometer tapped by circumstances to register change, turning to ice, warming, melting and breaking.

For can we ever truly forgive the dead for abandoning us, and is it possible to live a decent life if we cannot forgive? 'How do the pieces of a life fit together?' Jim asks at the end of the book and of course there is not an answer.

Yet despite the winter and the drinking and the stunned inertia and the marital sniping, and even allowing that this is also a skilled study of loss, of shame, of history repeating itself and intergenerational strife, the novel shimmers with humour that is dry as a Havana martini and darker than an Islay malt

OK. Spoiler alert! Finally, out of the ice-white bitingly cold blue we meet…no, can't do it. Buy it and read it for yourself. It is beautifully and sensitively written with a convincing and clever ending that startles and satisfies, and bodes very well indeed for Mr McCulloch's future fiction. ■



Moontide
By Niall Campbell
Published by Bloodaxe
Review by Roseanne Watt

I first chanced on the work of Hebridean poet Niall Campbell a few years ago, thumbing through the pages of *The Salt Book of Younger Poets*. In an anthology with a fair few meandering poems, I was immediately struck by the discipline of Campbell's work. A rare, lyrical craftsmanship easily made him my favourite poet in the book (a preference compounded, perhaps, by the island themes of his verse) – as such, I have eagerly anticipated his debut collection, *Moontide*.

The poems of *Moontide* are of a quiet kind of confidence; never overbearing nor prone to easy-conclusions. Campbell's island-roots lend a certain mystical timbre to his verse, with poems that frequently murmur on the cusp of reality and myth, and where the presence of the sea – especially at night – particularly resonates: here, beached whales become symbols for enduring love ('who softly climbed the aching stair/of shore together,'), the drowned climb ashore to seek shelter in nearby dwellings ('drying out their lungs, that hang in their chests'), and even across the Minch, Scotland's cities become their own gods.

Campbell's poetry does not shirk away from tradition, either, and openly wears its influences from the likes of Heaney, Burnside and Jamie. Campbell displays a deep understanding of the poetic interconnection of nature and myth, as well as a deft mastery of turning a phrase, making this collection a pleasure to re-read. This acknowledgment of his poetic forerunners, as well as Campbell's concision, gives only further substance to a collection whose main thematic preoccupation is with the passing of time and its influence on the human endeavour, often realised in fleeting – yet crucial – lyrical moments, such as in 'Window, Honley': 'The village bell's been broken for a month,/sounding a flat, wrecked chime to the main hour;/ … so I'll ask what time matters anyway: just light, less light and dark, the going off/ of milk or love; our tides claimed back: …'

There is a temptation amongst critics to conflate 'solitude' with 'isolation' when considering the work of island poets – which, by proxy, breeds misconceptions of islands and island-life. There is certainly an odd, romantic ideal in circulation which sees islands as the Ultima Thule; impossibly liminal spaces ripe for discovery, where true escape is possible. But to attach the word 'isolated' to the entirety of this collection, as some sort of inevitable result from the poet's home and upbringing, is to banish Campbell's work to dealing only with so-called peripheries, denying it (and islands) the possibility to be their own centre. It is interesting to note, then, how it is only when the poet writes outside an island-context that we witness any hint of isolation, such as in 'Le Penseur', where a language barrier sees the poet at his most alone, or even 'An Introduction To The Gods of Scotland', where it is the cities of Scotland that are presented as legendary gods, distant and strange. *Moontide* is a honed and poised debut, filled with islands and the scope of the sea; but you will find nothing remote or insular about them in these pages. ■

Bones & Breath
By Alexander Hutchison
Salt Publishing
Review by Sally Evans

The first thing I want to be told in a review (if I don't already know it) is what kind of poetry this is. Alexander Hutchison's work however is different from any type. He has pulled virtues from many international sources, including Auden, for verbalism and dry wit, the outdoor poets of the Americas for narrative adventurousness, and Kleinzahler perhaps for American rhythms. The language doesn't at first strike one as particularly Scottish, apart from 5 poems in Scots which mainly relish their own robust and sometimes obscure vocabulary. The idiom and style of Hutchison's English is Anglo-American, but the interest, content and drive of the poems being both masculine and economical, they do undoubtedly suggest a Scottish mind at work.

Hutchison's book lives in the space between free verse and metrical, and is full of phrases looked at again, set in a new light, from the first words of the first poem

> Well, here we are again
> to the end of the book
> What's yours wont go by you.

The majority of the poems are short-lined and spare, though there are occasional wide-lined poems which have something of the character of prose poems. It's always the language rather than any narrative that counts. Not as spare as it looks, it is a poetry of spells, repetitions and complex patterns, which switches smoothly from narrative to incantatory, with the often extrovert subject matter not of primary importance. The stories of a mountain expedition ('Camp Four') and a partial conversation with W.S. (Sydney) Graham ('Setting the Time Aside') are not given directly but in the concomitant detail, ▸▸

the slipstream. *Tell it slant*, Emily Dickinson's famous line and the name of Glasgow's new poetry bookshop, could be a slogan for Hutchison's work.

A belief in the importance of poetry comes over strongly in this book. The purpose of these poems is not description or entertainment, it is to pick up on rhythms and sounds and repetitions to find a music in the language.

The two paranarrative poems mentioned above comprise two of the five sections of the book. The last section is *Tardigrade,* a scientific conceit which has nevertheless proper narrative and is, intentionally, the major poem in the book. Of the remaining short poems, I like best 'Tod', another at first simple narrative of an urban fox, sneaking predictably down the stairs of the Mound in Edinburgh, but then taking the observer on an unexpected and faintly surreal visit to the National Galleries in the city centre. This poem ends

> Tod takes a turn or two closer,
>
> edging in, you can sense it, her totem,
> soon to be gone again, scarcely there,
>
> in the faintest smirr of Egyptian blue,
> a shadow on the polished parquet floor,
>
> completing another low turn, claws, brush,
> tucked in, falls soft and sound asleep.

This is where the poetry sings most, and in 'Tardigrade': 'Milky green clouds of hydrogen sulphide/off the coast of Namibia kill fish aplenty,/but the birds rejoice that feed off their/ carcasses. Look further out, and deeper in. ■

Doubling Back
By Linda Cracknell
Freight Books
Review by Stephen Keeler

There is an inconspicuous sentence in *Following Our Fathers* (an earlier, slim volume of two essays which have been included in *Doubling Back*) which seems to suggest something of Linda Cracknell's deep-rooted motivations: 'The hills tremble with promise.' Inconspicuous perhaps, but each time I have read it my attention has snagged on it like a burr snags on tweed for it is characteristic of the rhythmic serenity of Cracknell's writing which induces in the reader a concomitant calm – the heart-rate slows, the breathing settles… "the burn cackles, calling walkers to follow it upstream. And, as usual, I submit to the deep embrace of the wooded gorge", and although she doesn't spell it out – this is nothing so crude as a walker's manifesto – there is always the suggestion of a 'why-I-walk' subtitle, to 'explore how the act of walking and the landscapes we move through can shape who we are and how we understand the world'.

The book's actual subtitle,'ten paths trodden in memory', also suggests motivations. Here are simple journeys with ultimate goals, walks which are 'a means of renewing lost parts of ourselves' often by retracing one's own steps or those of significant others. Ostensibly, Cracknell's goals vary. There is an homage to a Norwegian war hero, and a daughter's quest for the lost father to whom the book is dedicated; there's a familiar walk home among The Birks of Aberfeldy, in Perthshire, and a slow descent to the Northumbrian coast with a new companion. And there is solidarity among women, and liberation from footwear, in Kenya. Each 'necessary adventure' becomes 'a story retraced and given words out of silence.'

All of which suggests much contemplation and poetry. In *Doubling Back* Cracknell is at her most contemplative yet in print, and she could not write an unpoetic sentence if she tried. On her way from Melrose to Lindisfarne, 'flashes of sun scratched bright the wide ribbon of the Tweed…', and each of her settings-out, whether in Switzerland or Spain or here in Scotland, is 'the realisation of an obsessive curiosity' which seems 'to have chosen me, rather as stories choose to be written'. She calls, for contemplative company, on Jessie Kesson and John Bunyan, on Thomas the Rhymer and Rabbie Burns, on elderly relatives and family friends, and she searches out, in the ground beneath her feet, some of those who have trodden these paths before – drovers and saints and other 'adventurers' – with a nod, on home ground, to 'the fit-looking couple in their early seventies who pound up and plummet down daily. We always exchange greetings and grins of recognition even though I don't know their names.'

In *Doubling Back*, Linda Cracknell asserts that each of us walks 'in our own small allegory'. The same walk, repeated, like the same story re-told, is never actually the same. The hills do indeed tremble with promise. ■

Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story
Collected Dramatic Works.
Luath Press
Review by George Gunn

As Scottish theatre continues to suffer from shallow vein dramaturgical thrombosis this volume of Robert McLellan's plays acts as an exercised palliative to the cultureless narcissism of what appears on most contemporary Scottish stages. The fact that only two of these important plays, which are included here, have been produced professionally this century – and one of these in London – graphically highlights the tension McLellan's work has generated in Scottish theatre and the importance of this timely book, edited by Colin Donati, which at last makes available to the general reader the dramatic achievement of this major – although scandalously neglected – Scottish writer.

His thirty four year creative span from *Jeddart Justice* in 1933 to *The Hypocrite* in 1967, encompassing nine full length plays, four one act plays, three verse plays as well as the Linmill stories (reissued in a separate Luath volume in 2007) and the occasional poems along the way, represents a dramatic vision which captures epochs as units of lived time where the various levels of the superstructure have a special relationship to one another (the comedies, the tragedies, the history plays) and where the central characters (either Kings or commoners) acquire an equally special significance. The principal subject of Robert McLellan's drama was the Scottish people and their history, their lives and their language.

History, like theatre, is a mere construction but the achievement of McLellan as a dramatic writer of the first rank lies in his ability to infuse his plays with memorable characters who, whilst they are free in the space of the stage, are trapped in their historical time but are liberated from it by the skilfully gestic use of the muscular beauty of the Scots language. Robert McLellan's dialogue is a stage poetry of rare effectiveness. In the tradition of Lorca and Brecht he was a poet who was drawn to the theatre because of the visual and physical acoustic the stage could bring to his work. In fact, in plays such as *The Flouers o Edinburgh* and *Young Auchinleck*, language and the political power and status associated with its use, supplies the narrative with its energy and drive.

Yet as a playwright McLellan's other primary concern was for his audience which was a much more popular and populous audience than the theatre enjoys today. He made his characters accessible to his audience through the language they used. He employed language to undermine the assumptions of the powerful and to empower the disenfranchised. McLellan understood, as Brecht has made plain, that 'in poetry morality resides not in indignation, but in truthfulness.'

As fellow playwright and poet Donald Campbell puts it in his vivid and vigorous 'Appreciation' (which acts an introduction to the book), of seeing Duncan Macrae play the title role in *Jamie The Saxt* at the Royal Lyceum in 1956: 'Entertaining as it was, Jamie The Saxt gave us something more than mere entertainment –it gave us liberation.'

The theatre – whatever else it is - is a community of intention as well as of people. Until Scottish theatre follows the lead given to it by recent groundbreaking dramatists such as Byatt, McGrath and Campbell himself, instead of increasingly adopting the gate-keeping, cultural managerialism as instigated by James Bridie, as is the case now, then the plays of Robert McLellan will be denied their rightful oxygen of performance and the people will continue to be culturally mis-served. This welcome book – one of the most important to be published in Scotland since the year 2000 – goes a good way in putting the work of Robert McLellan back into the public imagination where it belongs. ■

Ghost Moon
By Ron Butlin
Salt Publishing
Review by Liam Murray Bell

Butlin's fourth novel, *Ghost Moon,* is set mostly in post-war Edinburgh and there's a pleasing note of Muriel Spark in the way that the main character, Maggie, searches for a change in attitude – a modernisation of rigid social structures – that would allow her to break free of conservative traditions. As an unwed, expectant mother, she journeys from Edinburgh to the Isle of Lewis and back again, but finds only the closed cottage door of family friends, the Callanders, in Stornoway and the sneer of Mrs Saunders at Woodstock House, a children's home in Edinburgh.

Framing this story-strand is a contemporary narrative which places us in a care home with Maggie, who now suffers from dementia and is visited by her son, Tom. This is where – for me – the novel becomes less convincing. In part, this is because Tom never comes into full-focus as a character but, much more so, it is because the stories of both Maggie and Tom are given in second-person. It's a delicate technique and using it for two different characters is an issue, as it leaves you slightly disorientated every time you are addressed because it takes you a moment to place exactly where you are meant to be and whose shoes you are supposed to be filling.

The majority of the narrative, set in the 50s, is written in close, third-person, though, and it is not only well-handled but evokes a great deal of sympathy for the matter-of-fact Maggie, whose slightly curt manner is easy to warm to if only because she is recognisable as an authentic Scotswoman – brusque but not brash – forced into a difficult decision and then struggling to regain a degree of control in the face of a set of traditions – religious and secular – that allow little leniency. Butlin's short, sharp writing style echoes this pragmatism perfectly and there is something reminiscent of Jon McGregor's *So Many Ways to Begin* not only in the back-and-forth structure of the narrative and the examination of a mother-son bond, but also in the precise and tightly-woven prose.

Butlin characterises in a phrase or two, rarely more, as with Maggie's love-interest, Michael, who she first encounters in those early Stornoway passages: "She kept expecting him to blink to clear his vision, but he never did". His blindness comes to define him as a character. For the most part, this sparse approach is a positive – it keeps us clipping along at quite a pace – but it does mean that some of the fringe characters can feel a little on the flat side.

Elsewhere, Butlin has spoken about the book being inspired by a real-life story and it is apparent that the main focus is Maggie and the struggles that she undergoes as a character in post-war Edinburgh. It is very readable for that and, indeed, feels well-judged in that the reader is asked to side with Maggie rather than to pity her. The fracturing of the mother-son relationship, both in the 50s and in the contemporary narrative, is observed beautifully and the sentiment carefully controlled and enhanced by the double timeframe, carrying us through to a gentle, understated conclusion that underlines the lyrical quality of Butlin's writing. ■

The Touch of Time
By Stewart Conn
Bloodaxe Books
Review by Stuart B. Campbell

I'm going to have to make a confession: I once had a pleasant conversation about poetry with a nice sales assistant in a local bookshop when I realised that she thought I was Stewart Conn. To save her any embarrassment (and to not appear a total sucker for a compliment), I didn't let on. Any time after when she'd ask, "Are you still writing your poems?", I'd

just say, "Oh, I'm still working away." I was sure I wasn't misrepresenting Stewart Conn's literary endeavours; *The Touch of Time*, his *New & Selected Poems*, backs up my assumption about his poetic output.

Along with thirty-two new poems, this volume contains work drawn from his ten previous collections, from the last fifty years – a considerable and significant contribution to our culture. The collection is presented in ten sections. Although the acknowledgements state that the poems 'tend to be grouped thematically rather than observing strict chronology', it does seem to follow the time-line of Conn's collections. SectionVIII is from his 2005 *Ghosts at Cockcrow*, section IX from *The Breakfast Room* (2010) and *X* is the new poems. Therein lies the source of consternation for this reader. The first seven sections of this 'selected' are virtually identical, with the insertion and deletion of a few poems, to all seven sections of his previous 'selected' poems *Stolen Light*. The acknowledgements (there isn't an introduction) states that a 'number of revisions and excisions have been made'. So, 'Vanities', for instance, is not included but 'Reading Matter' is; only 'Lothian Burn' from the Pentlands group makes the cut. The substitution of one poem for another, or for some to be dropped altogether, is perhaps neither here nor there in the grand scheme of things, but the reason for doing so isn't apparent. *The Touch of Time* contains about twenty more poems than *Stolen Light*, but it's difficult to not just assume the weeding out of poems for the first seven sections was done only to make space for the new poems and those from Conn's last two collections; perhaps an opportunity to do something different has been missed. To be fair, the publisher does make it clear that the poems in sections I – VII "are extracted from Stolen Light", but that doesn't stop me feeling this collection is really just *Stolen Light* updated. If there have been revisions to any of the individual poems (short of doing a word for word comparison), it's not evident. 'Summer, Assynt' no longer has its subtitles, but I couldn't see any obvious reworking of the poems. Slight differences between the two books occur, but only insofar as some of the section breaks have moved: 'At Coruisk' is now in section II, whereas it was previously in section III. By and large, the poems appear in the same sequence in both books. All of which begs the question: who is this book aimed at? If you already have a copy of *Stolen Light*, £12.00 might seem a lot to pay for a book that is 70% of one you already have; some readers might think (justifiably) it's good value for the new poems, but that might be stretching it a bit, even for an avid fan if he or she had the last two full collections. For anybody coming to Conn's poetry for the first time, this comprehensive selection is probably indispensable.

What of the actual poetry? Here I have to also give a personal response. Amongst the psychopathic, alcoholic and shell-shocked teachers I had in the early 70s, a gem of an English teacher had the genius to give us Stewart Conn; specifically, 'In a Simple Light'. That poem opened the door, not only to Conn's poetry, but to what poetry could do, how it could be. In a language that wasn't fussy, or flowery and without showy cleverness, here was poetry that could work magic. It was poetry that was memorable, honest and vivid. Conn's poetry, to me, has always seemed rooted in reality (including the inventions of 'Roull of Corstorphin' and 'The Luncheon of the Boating Party'), but gifting us a rejuvenating perspective on life. The publisher's blurb describes this book as a 'retrospective'. Sure, it contains work from the past, but, even if some later poems are concerned with the passing of the years, it seems to me that the poetry looks forwards and out. The new work collected here does show Stewart Conn really has been 'working away' crafting poems that are strong and enhancing. ■

Europe, the Highlands and Me: Essays and travels
By James Miller
Available via Amazon Kindle
Review by Rhoda Michael

It has been a special pleasure for me to have the opportunity of reviewing this most recent of James Miller's books, several of which will be already known to readers of *Northwords Now.* His experience is wide-ranging: historian, storyteller, journalist and maker of connections. This is a detailed travelogue enriched with history. As I read I reach, repeatedly, for my European atlas.

Jim grew up in the Caithness Highlands but now lives near Inverness. At one time he worked on the Inverness Courier (as, indeed, did I in the mid-fifties; when Evan Barron was still alive, and when his niece, Evelyn, was editor.) In the first short chapter of the book he describes what he calls 'The European Me'. He says, 'I came to Europe late . . . the Cold War, the early years of the Common Market and the E E Community, *les evenements* of 1968, the tumbling of the Berlin Wall . . . all happened unwitnessed by me . . .except through the eyes of the mass media.'

Already, in this first page of the book, we see how extensive his points of reference are. His focus is on those parts of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Scandinavia he has 'wandered through'; and he suggests that his approach may be like that of the antiquarian, Captain Francis Grose, described by Robert Burns as 'a chiel amang you takin' notes'.

He makes digressions, one of which was his father's account of an experience he had in WW1. His father described a running battle involving German destroyers, of taking to a rowing boat when their trawler was sunk by German fire; and of arriving at a tiny fishing settlement on the island of Hevroy. Jim went on a long walk to try to find it, got a clear view of it across a mile of sea, but had no boat to reach it. So he chose to let it remain for him an island in his father's story. Jim comments that others of his father's generation would also have stories to tell, thus building what he calls a community's oral history.

There are 24 chapters in this book, most of them of 3-5 pages, but each page crammed with detail; so this review will summarise severely. First a brief word about Jim's writing style: it is vigorously constructed, nicely paced – the boy can write! It has passages that have a lyrical quality ('spires like green arrows'; 'sun shining on the sprouting wheat'; 'a flock of cranes in a field of tatties'). And also there are a few cheeky jokes ('the school of hard Knox'; 'lost in the myths of time').

The narrative moves back and forth through time from the middle ages to the present. Things one has heard of are elaborated on – eg the Hanseatic League, seen by some as a forerunner of the single European Market. By the 16th and 17th centuries Holland and Sweden became more dominant and the League 'faded away into shadows'. The journey continues into Poland and the old city of Gdansk reduced to rubble by RAF bombs and Soviet shells in 1945. Part of Gdansk is known as 'old Scotland' because of trading links in the 16th and 17th centuries, and later especially salt herring, many tons of them every year.

There are detailed chapters on Leipzig, Brussels, Rotterdam, Maastricht, Geneva and others in between: Delft and its connection with the Common Fisheries policy; Luxembourg linked with the concept of 'capitals of culture' – an idea proposed in 1985 by Melina Mercouri. Glasgow benefited from being the first Scottish city to have that title. The Scottish Parliament made 2007 the 'Year of Highland Culture' with millions being spent on a major remodelling of Eden Court Theatre; and on Sabhal Mor Ostaig, the Gaelic college on Skye.

There are chapters on the invention of printing and its connection with the Reformation; chapters on political issues – such as de Gaulle's reluctance to have the UK join the EEC. And much, much more.

This is an entirely satisfying read which I have no hesitation in recommending as a bargain download, crammed with interest for any Scot. ■

Gaelic Reviews

An Daolag Shìonach
by Crìsdean MacIlleBhàin
Clò Ghille Mhoire
Beatha Ùr
by Niall O'Gallagher
CLÀR
Deò
by Marcas Mac an Tuairneir
Grace Note Publications
Sùil air an t-Saoghal
ed. by Niall O'Gallagher and Pàdraig MacAoidh
Clò Ostaig
Reading the Gaelic Landscape: Leughadh Aghaidh na Tìre
by John Murray
Whittles Publishing
Reviews by Moray Watson

Crìsdean MacIlleBhàin is a long-established fixture in Gaelic literature, and his latest volume, *An Daolag Shìonach*, confirms his status as one of the senior figures of the post-renaissance generation. *An Daolag Shìonach* is a mixture of previously unpublished poems, along with a number of new ones written for the volume. Themes are understandably varied with such a range of work from such a span of time: notably, hope, courage, revival, and choice return throughout. The volume is arranged in four chronological parts. MacIlleBhàin's poetry is highly allusive, with one eye on a Gaelic mythical background and the other scanning the poetic horizon for styles, influences, forms and themes without limitation or stricture. MacIlleBhàin draws on a compendious knowledge of European and world literature to inform his work, both in terms of subject-matter and, especially, in form. Niall O'Gallagher contributes an essay, which is regrettably brief but characteristically insightful.

There is something prophetic about the title of Niall O'Gallagher's first collection, *Beatha Ùr* ('New Life'). Just as MacIlleBhàin's work has been at the forefront of innovation and experimentation over the past quarter of a century, so O'Gallagher is representative of a current generation that is entirely comfortable with the idea of Gaelic as a world literature, relevant outside of its heartland communities and able to engage in creative dialogue with any tradition that catches their attention. That this current position is due to the impact and achievement of the renaissance generation is never in any doubt. What may raise doubts is the extent to which some of these contemporary poets are fully rooted in the soil of the centuries-old Gaelic tradition.

Beatha Ùr contains 36 short poems, in which O'Gallagher shows a preference for shorter stanzas, especially of three lines. In some poems, there is little formal metrical ornamentation, with the result that a few pieces read rather like prose. Linguistically, O'Gallagher makes a good deal of use of the past participle/passive conditional forms of the language, to the extent that this starts to become part of a recognisable 'voice'. This appears notably more than once in the phrase "nach briste", which links to one of the underlying ideas in this book: that of 'breakability'. There are many discernible influences, some of which the poet points to overtly, from English, Gaelic, Latin and other literary sources. The collection is partly comprised of a set of little poetic sequences that are broken up throughout the book. This is a most effective device: the collection becomes as compelling as a short story cycle. There are many love poems in *Beatha Ùr*, and a bright, optimistic sense of love runs throughout much of the volume.

Another of the new poets is Marcas Mac an Tuairneir. As a student, Mac an Tuairneir was drawn to the freshness and energy he saw in Crìsdean MacIlleBhàin's work, so it seems entirely fitting that he should have titled his own first collection *Deò* ('breath', 'air', 'vital spark'). Mac an Tuairneir was impressed by MacIlleBhàin's willingness to explore same-sex love and relationships in his poetry, and these issues are very much at the forefront in his own writing. But, in *Deò*, it is clear that a generational change has taken place since MacIlleBhàin's early poetry. Mac an Tuairneir is not writing about a subject he knows may shock his audience in the way MacIlleBhàin might have been: he is simply writing his experience of the world, and the result is at once passionate yet composed, erotic and confident. Brief prose moments elucidate some of Mac an Tuairneir's background thoughts on issues the poems explore, such as the redefining of contemporary 'Gaelicness', the way the Gaelic community engages with ▶▶

homosexuality, and how the poet feels about Aberdeen.

It would be an unforgivable oversight not to mention the beauty of the book as a physical artefact. Grace Note Publications have excelled themselves with the artistry that has been invested in the design of the book. From the cover, through the choice of fonts, to internal pictures, the entire book has been produced as a luxury item to be savoured and enjoyed visually. Mac an Tuairneir was mentored by the established writer Màrtainn Mac an t-Saoir. Mac an t-Saoir contributes a foreword to the book, in which he states that "This is exactly what the current Gaelic literary world needs": who can argue with that?

In recent years, there has been a drive to produce more academic literature in Gaelic and help to create a more 'normal' relationship between text, audience, critic and author (where the conversations were previously held mainly in English and thus estranged from the literature itself). Niall O'Gallagher and Pàdraig MacAoidh have added to this effort with their useful and timely collection of essays, *Sùil air an t-Saoghal*. The volume contains nine essays, some of them by creative writers and some by critics.

The editors point out that Gaelic literature never existed in isolation: that, like other literatures, it has constantly been in contact with other parts of the world, its writers learning and adapting the ideas of their peers from elsewhere. They describe it as being rather like the old Gaelic system of fosterage, which created, and constantly re-creates, the process we come to call 'the tradition'. And so we read with interest about how literature from around the world has enriched and enhanced the poetry of Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul and Maoilios Caimbeul. Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh discusses how languages each tell their own story about the world and no two languages describe it in quite the same way. He laments the fact that, when he started with Gaelic in 1965, there was very little access to books or literature of any kind. He laments, too, how reluctant we have been to translate the great literature into Gaelic, pointing out that it is not good enough to accept that it is available in English. I have an essay in the book myself, in which I discuss Gaelic fiction's relationship with the world outside of the Gàidhealtachd. Highlights among the contributions from academics include Iain S. Mac a' Phearsain's discussion of Iain Moireach in the context of Albert Camus and Emma Dymock's fine essay on the work of Somhairle MacGill-Eain.

The final book under review is a complete departure from these literary works: John Murray's *Reading the Gaelic Landscape: Leughadh Aghaidh na Tìre*. Murray wrote the book out of a desire to help people re-connect with, and communicate about, the landscape around them. Murray's aim is to give people a rich store of relevant Gaelic vocabulary, the spelling to be able to write the names correctly, and the pronunciation to be able to talk about places confidently with native Gaelic speakers. The author's enthusiasm for the language comes through clearly, and he makes a strong case for his belief that a knowledge of the meaning and pronunciation of the place-names can enhance people's enjoyment of the environment itself. I must confess I kept wondering whether the book's sections on grammar would really hold the attention of readers who are ordinarily reticent about learning these things. But Murray may be assumed to know his audience better than I do. He handles these grammar lessons well, showing deftness with explaining the intricacies of the genitive and definite articles. My main concern with the book rests in the use of laymen's phonetics to try to convey pronunciation. The difficulty with trying to describe pronunciation in the absence of audio backup lies in the dilemma that most readers in the British Isles are not IPA-literate, but we have such a spectrum of accents that it is almost impossible to be able to rely on transferring somebody's sense of an English pronunciation onto another language. I found that, in many cases, when I tried to read Murray's phonetic renderings, I ended up with a pronunciation that was markedly distant from how I would expect the Gaelic words to sound. This is not so much a weakness with this particular book as it is a general problem we could benefit from addressing in this country: indeed, Murray's book goes some way towards addressing the fact that the importance of linguistic training should not be underestimated. Like *Deò*, albeit in completely different ways, this is a beautiful book, full of illustrations and including some stunning photography of the landscape. The author is very much to be congratulated on the insight and commitment to bring this book to fruition. I suspect that he hopes other outdoors enthusiasts will, like himself, come to be inspired to learn more about Gaelic once they start viewing the landscape armed with the knowledge gained from his book: he could very well be right. ■

Poetry Reviews
Tom McGrath, *Sardines,* Tapsalterie
Calum Rodger, *Know Yr Stuff,* Tapsalterie
Gerrie Fellows, *The Body in Space,* Shearsman Books
J L Williams, *Locust and Marlin*, Shearsman Books
Olivia McMahon, *What are you looking at me for?* Malfranteaux Concepts
Yvonne Marjot, *The Knitted Curiosity Cabinet,* Indigo Dreams Publishing
Reviews By Mandy Haggith

Tom McGrath's *Sardines,* first published in 1986, has just been reprinted by fledgling Aberdeenshire publisher Tapsalterie, an inspired way for a new book producer to break into the Scottish poetry scene. I think of McGrath as a playwright, but this collection of writing reminds me, as Liz Lochhead does, that there is no clear line between poetry written for the stage and for the page. Does it matter, if it makes you laugh and it makes you think?

There is great satire in *Sardines.* The TV food programme script explaining the delicacies of 'Eossaise Haute Cuisine' (Ken Noo Guide Tae Scottish Cookery) was clearly ahead of its time, and is a perfect lampoon of celebrity chefs going back to basics, exploring all the intricacies (and condiniements) of a Glaswegian fish supper. Like Tom Leonard, McGrath is alert to the British media's biases and snobbery, and the way tragic realities of life for poor people are drowned out by the trivial doings of the rich and powerful. 'Only three lines for Mrs. Simpson', a critique of media coverage of a death of a woman from hyperthermia, is just as pertinent now as it must have been then, and only some of the names have changed.

> Jim Callaghan is battered by the unions.
> It's reported that the Queen has got a cold.
> Sex scandals are the rage,
> take up all of the front page.
> But only three lines for Mrs. Simpson.

This is a collection full of voices you'll recognise, but won't read in books from the mainstream poetry publishing houses.

As well as reprinting McGrath, Tapsalterie has produced a new collection from Calum Rodger, *Know Yr Stuff*. It begins with a paean to the writer's Social Ed teacher who gave him a copy of *Drugs: Know Your Stuff*, which set him on a path of pharmaceutical exploration, presumably quite the opposite of what was intended by either the book or the teacher. This hedonistic note is pursued throughout the whole volume, the titles of pieces 'pleasure', 'sexual positions with imaginary girlfriends', and 'because I am drunk' give a good idea of the central obsessions of the author.

A central obsession is no bad thing in a poetry book, and Olivia McMahon demonstrates this perfectly in *what are you looking at me for?* The book is entirely devoted to poems written in response to works of art from the Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums Collection, all but one of which are reproduced. Every art gallery should have a poetry book like this. The poems talk directly to the paintings, highlighting things I would not have noticed, such as what the Faithless Shepherd is wearing as he runs away from wolves attacking his flock:

> … The red stockings judge him,
> jar in that gentle ochre landscape,
> proclaim the shame of those legs in flight.

There's humour here too. 'Study after Pope Innocent X by Velazquez' is written in the outraged voice of the Pope himself, horrified by how Francis Bacon has represented him and belatedly preferring the earlier painting by Velazquez, with its 'tumble of white lace that Diego painted so lovingly… This is a fake. This is not me.' The title of the collection, *what are you looking at me for?* comes from this poem, opening up the question of what, as observers of art, we are seeking, and cleverly revealing the layer upon layer of representation, from the subject's own view of himself, through those of the painters, and that of the poet, to our own. The collection concludes with a sequence inspired by a set of plates arranged around a table, a piece by Ian Hamilton Finlay representing women involved in the French Revolution. Historical research and a great deal of wit are deftly woven into conversations between the various characters. Throughout the book, the language of the poems is straight-forward, but the insight they offer into the art works is laser-sharp.

Yvonne Marjot's *Knitted Curiosity Cabinet* is a gathering of poems that begins with landscape and nature evocation and gradually takes us more and more intimately inside a family. Children's lives, tragic loss and parental elegy emerge in poems that range from formal sonnets to wandering free verse. There are lighter notes too, such as the punctuation of the volume with a sequence of cheeky 'How to write poetry' poems. My favourite:

> A handful of words,
> And seventeen syllables.
> Now you're nearly there.

J L Williams' poems are steeped in rich language, lush imagery, sumptuous description; sometimes disarmingly simple, in places obtuse, most often beautiful. She does stones brilliantly. And love. Here is the whole of one poem, *Nor Loch,* to give a flavour.

> Lilac past its best, wet air
> sticky with a sick perfume.
>
> Wind in sodden trees, green
> grass that white moths drown in.
>
> The fountain flooded.
> The rubbed-out castle
> aching above the graveyard, its bones soaking
> in the eidolon of water.

Another Shearsman volume, *The Body in Space* by Gerrie Fellows, presents Scotland through the eyes of a poet who, from New Zealand, can still look at the country with the eyes of a foreigner, yet also with the friendly intimacy of a long-time resident. This five part collection covers a vast amount of ground, geological time, mourning and joy. All of life seems to be here, carefully and painstakingly articulated by a poet who does not shy from life's hard moments yet is also trying

> to construct
> a language of happiness
>
> oblique small sidelong
> it also makes
> these sudden, darting, crested shapes…'

This is from a poem ostensibly about waxwings, but which gestures, in the way John Burnside does and as many of these poems do beautifully, to deeper themes. ■

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

James Andrew has had two poetry books published, one of which won a Scottish Arts Council award. He is currently writing a novel. He lives in Nairn**.**

Karen Bek-Pedersen has a past as an honorary Scot. She now lives in Denmark where she does rowing, teaches Old Norse and works as a translator.

Liam Murray Bell is the author of two novels: *The Busker* and *So It Is*. He lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Stirling.

Simon Berry recently published a critical biography of the poet Alexander Smith Applauding Thunder (FTRR Press, 2013). He writes erotic fiction under a pseudonym. He lived in Glasgow and Cyprus before settling in the Scottish Highlands.

Tanera Bryden is a freelance arts PR consultant and writer. She recently moved back to the Highlands from London where she worked for national fundraising charity, the Art Fund.

Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul À Uibhist a Deas. Chaidh urram leabhar bàrdachd na bliadhna ann an Alba a bhuileachadh air a' chruinneachadh mu dheireadh leis, *Aibisidh*.

Stuart B Campbell Poetry recently commissioned to provide the continuity narrative for the multi award-winning film *Distilled* (Hotaches Productions http://hotaches.com/) – a documentary about the climbing career of Andy Cave.

Jared A. Carnie is a writer in his twenties currently enjoying the freedom of the Outer Hebrides.

PDerek Crook moved to Mull thirty years ago and the island caused him to resume writing. He is currently experimenting with traditional strict forms and following Dylan Thomas's dictum "Cut everything to the bone".

Irene Cunningham lives beside Loch Lomond, published in *London Review of Books* (as Maggie York), *Stand, New Welsh Review, Poetry Scotland*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Envoi*.

Angus Dunn lives in the hills of Morayshire where he works with words and wood. His most recent novel is *Writing in the Sand*, published by Luath.

Sally Evans' most recent collection is *Poetic Adventures in Scotland with Seventy Selected Poems*. She edits *Poetry Scotland*.

Dàibhidh Eyre À Drochaid a' Chòta. Dàin leis ann *an An Guth, Irish Pages, Poetry Scotland* agus an leithid.

John Glenday lives in Drumnadrochit. His most recent collection, *Grain*, was shortlisted for both the Ted Hughes Award and the Griffin Poetry Prize.

George Gunn is a poet and playwright. His most recent collection of poems, *A Northerly Land*, was published in 2013.

Mandy Haggith lives in Assynt and writes in a shed with a tree-top view. Her latest novel is *Bear Witness*, published by Saraband . Mandy can be contacted at hag@worldforest.org

Audrey Henderson is a 2014 Hawthornden Fellow. Her manuscript *Airstream* will be published this November by Homebound Publications.

Vicki Husband lives and works in Glasgow and is a member of St. Mungo's Mirrorball – a great network of poets. She blogs at:
http://vickihusband.wordpress.com:

Stephen Keeler is a teacher and writer. He lives in the north-west Highlands where he reads, writes and teaches creative writing workshops and courses. He is currently working on a first collection of poems.

Coinneach Lindsay Dàin leis ann *an Sandstone Review* etc. Na Fhilidh air Mhuinntearas aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig an-dràsta

Ingrid Leonard comes from Orkney, which inspires much of her poetry. Her poem 'Early March, Safety Matches' was recently commended by the Federation of Writers (Scotland).

Marcas Mac an Tuairneir À York. Cruinneachadh leis *Deò*.

Aonghas MacNeacail poet and songwriter, was born in Uig, on the Isle of Skye. He is also a broadcaster, journalist, scriptwriter, librettist and translator. A native Gael, he writes in Gaelic and English. His collections of poetry have been published in both languages, and his writing has appeared in literary journals all over the world.

Yvonne Marjot lives on the Isle of Mull. Her first volume of poetry, *The Knitted Curiosity Cabinet*, was published in April 2014.

Mary McDougall lives and writes in Highland Perthshire and spends time in Lewis. Much of her writing reflects her love of these places and people.

Hugh McMillan is an award winning poet. He is currently writing a book on contemporary tales of Dumfries and Galloway, commissioned by the Wigtown Book Festival.

Rhoda Michael began writing after she retired. She was editor of *Northwords Now* up to 2010.

Deborah Moffatt lives in Fife. Her poems have been widely published in the UK and Ireland. She won the 2012 Baker Prize for English poetry.

Alison Napier lives in Perthshire. She has an MA in Creative Writing, her fiction has appeared in various journals and anthologies and her first novel, *Take-Away People*, is currently seeking a publisher.

Lydia Popowich is a writer and artist living in Caithness. She has had work published in *Obsessed With Pipework, Dream Catcher, The Dalesman* and local anthologies.

Pauline Prior-Pitt lives on North Uist. She has published six books of poems. Her hand stitched pamphlet, *North Uist Sea Poems* won the 2006 Callum Macdonald Award.

Julian Ronay A' fuireach anns an Aghaidh Mhòir. Chaidh dàin leis a thaghadh airson duanaire an 20mh linn, *An Tuil*.

Kathrine Sowerby received a 2012/13 New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust. She co-edits *fourfold*, a curated poetry journal. kathrinesowerby.com

Eoghan Stewart is a Gaelic Teacher, part-time broadcaster and full time shinty obsessive. Influences are the Waterboys, Neil Gunn, and family background from Lewis, Skye, Bathgate and Trinidad.

Shane Strachan is currently working on a short story collection related to life in the Northeast fishing communities. He also writes for the stage.

Iain Urchardan Às na Hearadh, na mhinistear aig Eaglais na h-Alba. Chaidh Duais Sgrìobhadairean ùra Urras Leabhraichean na h-Alba a bhuileachadh air o chionn ghoirid.

Moray Watson is a lecturer in Gaelic Studies within the School of Language and Literature at the University of Aberdeen.

Roseanne Watt is from Shetland. She graduated from the University of Stirling with a BA (Hons) in English and Film Studies. She has since returned to complete the university's MLitt programme in Creative Writing.

Colin Will is an Edinburgh-born poet with a background in botany and geology. Seven collections published, the latest being *The Propriety of Weeding*, from Red Squirrel Press (2012). A collection of haibun, *The Book of Ways*, is due from Red Squirrel in October. He chairs the Board of StAnza.

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The Forest Bookstore, 26 Market Place, Selkirk
Kesley's Bookshop, 29 Market Street, Haddington, East Lothian
Prestongrange Museum, Morrison's Haven, Prestonpans
Montrose Library, 214 High Street, Montrose, Angus
Su Casa, Lorne Arcade, 115 High St, Ayr

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Blackwells Bookshop, 53-9 South Bridge
Scottish Poetry Library, 5 Crichtons Close
Elephant House Café, 21 George IV Bridge
The Village, 16 S. Fort Street
Filmhouse, 88 Lothian Road
Peter Green & Co, Warrender Park Road

Glasgow

Centre for Contemporary Arts, 350 Sauchiehall Street
Òran Mòr, 731 Gt. Western Road
The Piping Centre, 30 McPhater Street
Caledonia Books, 483 Gt Western Road
Tchai Ovna Teahouses, 42 Otago Lane
Mono, King's Court, 10 King Street
Gallery of Modern Art, Royal Exchange Square.

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